

Krshna: Historical Figure, Mythological Creation or the Combination of Both?

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to show and analyze how research on the historicity of Krshna is still in its infancy, therefore far from what some authors claim, that the discussion on the historicity of Krshna is an outdated subject, since most researchers agree that he lived in the distant past and fought in Mahābhārata war.

KEYWORDS: Krshna, Historicity, Purānas, Mahābhārata, Harivamsha, Neminātha, Jain Krshna, Jain Harivamsha.

Introduction

The work of decomposing the episodes of Krshna's life, in order to discriminate what is myth from what is history, is still in its infancy, when compared to the advanced work of the project "In Search of the Historical Jesus", so it is far from being a really critical effort on the historicity of Krshna. The doubt about Krshna's historicity only emerged with the arrival of British colonizers and later with the introduction of the rules of Textual Criticism in Indian literature, then used in the Bible, by Western researchers from the 19th century onwards. Therefore, before this, Krshna's existence was unanimous no Hindu doubted his historicity. Although there are a large number of authors dealing with Krshna, such as A. D. Pusalker's long list of publications up to 1955, the degree of criticism is still questionable (Pusalker, 1955: 49-50n1), extensive works on the subject alone are still rare. For, except for the recent "The Quest for the Historical Krshna" by Edwin F. Bryant and the old "Krshna Caritra" by Bankimchandra Chatterjee (1st edition 1886 and 2nd edition 1892), the "Studies in the Epics and Purānas" (1955: 49-81) by A. D. Pusalker and the "Krishna in History and Legend" (1969) by Bimandehari Majumdar, whose degrees of criticism in the last two works are still low, we find few critical studies on the subject, except for one

article here and there, against the countless apologetic works in defense of Krshna's historicity. Anyway, there are many works defending the historicity, but very few studies pointing out the fictionality in his life reports.

What prevents these authors from deepening the critique of studies is the fact that the few discussions on the subject, when they rarely happen, are made in books and articles written by professors of Hinduism or by confessional writers and admirers, who are more deferential to Hindu literature than properly critical historians. Because they are religious or sympathizers, the admiration for the culture and literature of the Hindus is such that it leads them to project historicity in books more than they deserve, to the point of finding historicity in the so mythological and so extravagant Purānas in passages with clear fictionalities. These are the scholars Guy L. Beck refers to when he said that “most scholars of Hinduism and Indian history accept the historicity of Krshna – that he was a real person, whether human or divine, who lived on Indian soil in around 1000 BC, and interacted with many other historical people within the cycles of epic and Puranic literatures” (Beck, 2005: 04). Although he, immediately afterwards, laments that “there is no serious biography, much less a standard biography” (idem, 04). Further on “thus Krshna, whose actual historical presence is no longer in dispute”, although he soon afterwards observed, “his (Krshna's) life has become virtually

immersed in mystery” (idem: 04-5). Further, he dared to say, “Krishna had more 'substance' of actual history than most religiously historical figures, although much of this information seems exaggerated at first sight” (idem: 05). The accounts of Krshna's life do not seem exaggerated, they are, strictly speaking, frighteningly exaggerated and fanciful in the eyes of an unreligious reader, only those who are used to believing in religious fantasies do not get scared. They just are not for delusionals who do not know how to differentiate myth from reality. Strictly speaking, there are no biographies, only hagiographies. Therefore, in the following pages, the reader will be able to see the difference in the perception of the myths, which surround Krshna's life with so many fantasies, in the minds of religious researchers and, in contrast, how much this perception differs when seen through the mind of a secular researcher.

Charles Freeman has briefly noted the following with regard to studies of the historicity of Jesus, which largely applies aptly to the current study of the historicity of Krshna: “The dominant issue in New Testament studies for the past two hundred years, it has been whether the sources of the gospels provide an accurate picture of the life of Jesus. The gospels have important discrepancies and omissions that make them difficult to use as historical texts, and their authors provide little critical appraisal of their sources, as was commonly done by the most sophisticated Greek historians of the

time. There is a tendency to fill in the gaps with the Jesus I want, the Jesus who fits the needs, to replace the Jesus we believe is inadequately portrayed in the gospels” (Freeman, 2009: 21). Likewise, or even more so, studies on the historicity of Krshna lack more rigor in validating sources and more critical in evaluations, as well as the presence of unreligious researchers in the studies. If historical studies of Jesus, which are more advanced, still receive these criticisms, then imagine the studies of Krshna, which are far behind, as they need more criticism, because of their character so deferential to traditional accounts.

In addition, the habit of reasoning in bloc is still blatant in almost all these religious authors. Like many biblical interpreters, Krshna's apologists, when they encounter an epic or Puranic passage, in which the account is confirmed by historical evidence (impartial records, inscriptions, sculptures, and numismatics), then for them almost everything in these texts is historical accounts, even the dialogues and the dazzling feats of the gods, the miracles of Krshna, the fantastic weapons (astra, chakra, vajra, etc.) and other fantasies. For them, if Krshna existed, then everything that is reported about what he spoke and everything reported about what he did are historical events. Strictly speaking, a secular historian does not reason like that.

The Disregard as to Historiography

A hallmark of Indian culture for many centuries has been its neglect of historical records. Different from other peoples that, since Antiquity, had historians such as Herodotus (5th century b.c.e.) and Thucydides (460-400 b.c.e.) in Greece, Fabius Pictor (3rd and 2nd centuries b.c.e.) and Titus Livius (3rd century b.c.e.) in Rome, Sima Qian (2nd and 1st centuries b.c.e.) in China and Manetho (3rd century b.c.e.) in Egypt, the Indians were not interested in historiography until the arrival of Muslim invaders in the Middle Ages. Thus, for many centuries, Indians confused history with mythology, and then developed a credulous culture in narratives that had no historical confirmation. One example is the extensive collection of the Purāṇas, mythological texts whose many Hindus attribute historicity.

This immense Indian credulity in accounts and characters without historical evidence shocked the colonizers during British domination. Used to venerating Jesus, whose historicity is more traceable, the English were horrified by the scale of credulity and the high degree of veneration of Hindus for the god Kṛṣṇa, who had no confirmation of his existence. Richard H. Davis observed, "To British eyes, Kṛṣṇa's lack of historicity reflected the lamentable lack of historical awareness among Indians. As Mill stated: 'in India (...) the actions of men and those of deities are united in a set of

legends, the most absurd and extravagant, the most transcendent to the limits of nature and reason, (however) less grateful to imagination and the taste of a rational and civilized people” (Davis, 2015: 85). In contrast, “For an orthodox Hindu, Kṛṣṇa is a reality, and his mere name has been the savior of innumerable afflicted souls for the past two thousand years. An orthodox Hindu is never concerned with Kṛṣṇa's historicity; to investigate the problem is sacrilege for him” (Pusalker, 1955: 49).

The historicity of the events and characters of the Mahābhārata, the Harivamsha and the Purāṇas is not yet confirmed by unreligious historians. For those who believe in the historicity, the suggestions for dates vary widely among proponents and reach even those who understand that the events never happened, despite the immense belief and zealous devotion by Hindus, especially to its protagonist, the god and hero Kṛṣṇa. Therefore, the gap between the Hindus' fervent worship of the god Kṛṣṇa and the complete absence of proof of his existence is something that even seems like a collective delusion. Therefore, as long as there is no historical confirmation of events, Kṛṣṇa, Mahābhārata, Harivamsha and Purāṇas are myths.

"Fictionalized Facts" and "Fictionalized Fictions"

With the advances in archaeological and historical research, today we know that not all myths, nor all legends, are completely fictions, more precisely, they are partial mixtures of fiction with real facts. When, from a fiction, the author adds real facts to the account, in order to create more reality appearance for his fictional account, we have an example of a “factualized fiction” account, or as in the novel *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco, a fiction with a mixture of imaginary characters and historical characters. On the other hand, when we have facts, in which the author adds fictions, then this is the account of “fictionalized fact”, as in the book “*Anna and the King of Siam*”¹ by Margaret Landon, released in 1944, which further fictionalized accounts already lightly fantasized by the character Anna Harriette Leonowens (1831-1915), in her set of articles on travel in the Boston newspaper *The Atlantic Monthly*, in 1869, with the title “*The Favorite of the Harem*”, later extended in her book “*The English Governess at the Siamese Court*”, published in 1870. Margaret Landon's book was later adapted for theater and cinema, increasing even more the fictionality, the dramatization and even introducing music with dance:

¹ Siam is the ancient name of Thailand.

Anna and the King of Siam (1946 – film with Rex Harrison);
 The King and I (1951 – play);
 The King and I (1956 - musical film with Yul Brynner and Deborah Kerr);
 Anna and the King (1972 – TV series with Yul Brynner and Samantha Eggar);
 The King and I (1999 – musical film);
 Anna and the King (1999 – film with Jodie Foster) and
 Anna and the King (2000 – animation).

Indeed, the story of Anna Harriette Leonowens is a successive process of increasing fictionality and dramatization, from the first reports by Anna H. Leonowens herself, through the fictionalized work of Margaret Landon, to the digressive and exciting deformed adaptations, internationally known, for theater and cinema. That is, Anna H. Leonowens really existed, traveled to Siam (Thailand), resided in the royal palace, taught the sons of King Mongkut (Rama IV), witnessed the events in the harem, but the accounts are filled with successive fictitious additions, which are not part of the events. The degree of fictionality is perceived when, instead of knowing her life only through the above works, we compare it with biographies based on the real facts of her life. The biography of reference currently is, "Bombay Anna: The Real Story and Remarkable Adventures of the King and I Governess", by Susan Morgan, published by the

University of California Press, thanks to the author's thorough research.

The examples above are just a few in the midst of a huge amount of works (literature, theater, cinema, animation, etc.) that have undergone the same process of "fictionalization", that is, reports that, based on historical facts, are added of fictions, embellishments, dramatizations and even musicalizations with dances, such as the examples above, in order to increase the dramatic strength of the narrative. In the cases of religious accounts, as we shall see below, the fictitious additions are juxtaposed to historical facts in order to increase the emotional, persuasive and catechetical charge of the message.

As in the case of Anna H. Leonowens, whose account of her life was fictionalized in the work of Margaret Landon and even more in the later adaptations for theater and cinema, a curious example in the religious sphere was that of Apollonius of Tiana, a sage Pythagorean who, like Jesus, was very likely also a historical character, lived shortly after Jesus, had his story mythologized in the hagiography *Vita Apollonii Tyanensis* (The Life of Apollonius of Tyana) by Flavius Philostratus (170-247 c.e.), published in 217 c.e., the main source for the knowledge of this mystic's life. In it, Philostratus introduced into Apollonius' life almost all of Jesus' great deeds: the healings, the resurrection of the dead, the proclamation of prophecies, the performance of miracles, the

confrontation with Roman authorities, the rejection of bloody sacrifices, the charity to the poor, imprisonment by Roman authorities, trial by a court, ascension to heaven and the apparition after death. All this with the intention of equaling or surpassing the deity of Apollonius before Jesus, in order to transform him into a rival of Jesus or into a Pagan Christ, in the face of the growth of Christianity in the first centuries of the Common Era (for details , see: Botelho, 2012).

Anyway, discovering someone's historicity, that is, whether this someone existed or not, is a first task, now, a very different one, and just as difficult, is to know what is fact or what is fiction in the stories of life and in the sayings of this someone, especially in the cases of older characters, when documentation was precarious and religion, with its sectarianism, was an influential agent for information.

The Importance of Impartiality

Therefore, the work of identifying what is myth, rumor and fiction, or what is reality in someone's accounts, becomes more difficult or easier, generally, depending on the antiquity or recentness of events. In the case of Anna H. Leonowens, this identification of what is fiction and what is fact in her life is facilitated by the abundant availability of preserved information from different sources, especially from outside sources of those

who intended to dramatize her, as she lived in a time, 19th century and early 20th century, when registration, documentation and archiving had become an important procedure for the conservation of culture, with the creation of graphic printing, journalism, notary offices, field research, museum, photography, audio recording and cinema. The recording and conservation of testimonies, the documentation of contemporary and impartial witnesses to the events are very important to identify, during the comparison with doubtful sources of information, what is fact or what is myth (fiction) in the reports. In the case of religious records, this identification becomes more difficult, sometimes even impossible, due to the partisan character and the rivalry in approaches, sometimes even hostile.

Knowledge of religious facts through an impartial source of information is important to recognize the reality behind religious manipulation, since, because of sacredness; religious communication is charged with preaching, exaltation and propaganda. When we know facts only through religious communication, what we know is not reality as it is, but reality as religion wants others to know. The masking of reality can be very common in religious communications. See the case of the arrest and conviction of Brazilian healer John of God (João de Deus in Portuguese), internationally known for his alleged cures, sought by celebrities from different parts of the world.

However, he is now serving a sentence of more than one hundred years, before in prison and now under house arrest due to the weakness of his health and the risk of the pandemic, for sexual harassment of more than 300 women, if the crimes had not prescribed, illegal possession of weapons, child trafficking and other crimes. The crimes were committed since his youth, but he was never investigated or denounced, and were not publicly known, as all police complaints did not turn into inquiries, as he was surrounded by a protective net that corrupted all who surrounded him, something like a mafia. This lasted for many years, that is, the facts were covered up and everyone thought that he was really a "divine man", so they called him John of God (João de Deus), as they only knew him through the information related by his institution or its admirers. Until recently, many years after the start of the crimes, the most powerful communication channel in Brazil, TV Globo, through a prestigious journalist, Pedro Bial, in its talk show, managed to convince some victims of sexual harassment to report their experiences in his program. The victims' testimonies had a resounding repercussion in Brazilian society and, the following day, the Attorney of Goiás state in Brazil requested an immediate investigation for the police. John of God was arrested, then sentenced to more than one hundred years in prison and is currently under house arrest, prohibited from providing care and healings.

Finally, an impartial organ was needed, that is, a television channel, to break the blocking of the concealment of reality about this perverted healer, and reveal the criminal facts committed by him, which were hidden by the divine image transmitted by his admirers and by their patients.

The Reasoning in Blocks of Religious

A common and at the same time unscientific mental habit of believers is to reason that everything in religious books is inseparably connected as a rigid block. That is, if one account is confirmed as historical fact, perhaps through an archaeological discovery, then all other accounts are equally historical. The sacred text is like a monolith impossible to be decomposed for analysis of its parts. For example, if one day somebody finds a piece of wood on Mount Ararat, Christians will think it is a part of Noah's Ark, so they will reason that all passages in the Bible, without exception, from Genesis to Revelation, are confirmations that they invariably form a homogeneous set of historical facts. Something as if the biblical passages could not be decomposed for individual analysis, that is, they form a uniform historicity. However, Science, Historiology and Textual Criticism do not reason like this. As the most recent studies conclude, we shall see later that religious texts are replete with the combination of historical facts with myths and legends, as well as myths and legends juxtaposed

with historical facts. After years of historical studies and debates, it is currently prudent to think that Jesus existed, but that does not mean that everything in the New Testament is history, more precisely, it is a juxtaposition of historical facts with fictions, hence the current project “In Search for the Historical Jesus”, in order to identify what is history and what is fiction in the acts and sayings of Jesus.

A fact that has recently excited Hindus and followers of the Hare Krishna Movement has been the spectacular discovery of the submerged city of Dwāarakā (द्वारका), known in Hindu texts (Mahābhārata and Harivamsha) as founded by Krishna and then flooded by the sea, as narrated in the last excerpts of the Mahābhārata and in the Vishnu Purāna V.23.03 and 38.04.² The archaeological discovery took place in the 1980s, by the archaeologist Dr. S. R. Rao and his team of divers, and led many credulous people to claim, based on block reasoning, that the simple discovery of some ruins of the submerged port city of Dwāarakā suffices to ascribe historicity to all the extensive narratives of the Mahābhārata, the Harivamsha and the Purānas. For them, with the discovery of some ruins, then the historicity of everything narrated about Krishna, of all the events of the Mahābhārata, of all the stories in Harivamsha and Book 10 of the

² The Vishnu Purāna states that the city was submerged by the waters, except for the temple (38.04), whereas the Mahābhārata states that everything was submerged.

Bhāgavata Purāna is proven, so these texts are not myths, but fully historical accounts. This hasty statement leaves us wondering whether the mere discovery of some ruins is enough to ascribe historicity to the spectacular event of the raising of the Govardhana Mountain by Kṛṣṇa's one hand alone, as narrated in Bhāgavata Purāna X.25 and Harivamsha 61?

In the same way, if it is proven that the Holy Shroud is really the mantle that covered the body of Jesus in the grave, then the historicity of Jesus is proven and, consequently, all the events narrated in the Gospels are historical, including the miracles of healings, the multiplication of fish, the walk on water, the resurrection of Lazarus, the resurrection of Jesus himself, the apparitions to the apostles after death, etc.?

Religious Composers are not Historians

Therefore, religious records are not always historical documents. In a casual way, we can extract historical facts from sacred texts, but it is necessary to know how to identify when the text narrates a historical fact and when it speaks of a fiction, a myth or a rumor. More than a concern with historicity, composers of religious texts are admirers, followers and indoctrinators, so they are more interested in exaltation, preaching and persuasion than in faithful documentation of facts, nor do they use critical criteria in compositions.

Hence, tales, myths and rumors are added to the facts in order to achieve more persuasive effect. For the religious composer, the important thing is not historical fidelity, but exaltation and catechetical power, so it is even worth changing the story to be convincing.

Since they are not historians committed to faithfully reporting the facts, each composer or compiler of religious texts records what best suits their ideology or their catechetical program. Thus, the same religious character may have more than one version, sometimes even antagonistic, about his life and his sayings. These differences may be on the character of exaltation, or on the exaltation and hostility. For example, the Canonical Gospels diverge from the Apocrypha Gospels, but both exalt Jesus, while the Canonical Gospels diverge even more from the hostile gospels recorded in the Jews' Sefer Toledoth Yeshu (Book on the Life of Jesus) collection, which belittle and humiliate Jesus, called in these texts Yeshu, therefore also known by the name of anti-gospels (Botelho, 2016a and Schäfer, 2014), as well as the derogatory accounts about Yeshu (Jesus) recorded in the Babylonian Talmud (Botelho, 2016b and Schäfer, 2007).

Thus, confidence in reports will not always depend on which is more faithful to the story, but rather on which religion or sect the reader or listener is engaged with. If he is a Catholic, he will trust the version about the life and sayings of Jesus from the Canonical Gospels, if he is a Jew, he will trust the

version about the life and sayings of Yeshe (Jesus) narrated in the Babylonian Talmud or in the Sepher Toledoth Yeshe collection. Alternatively, if he is a Muslim, he will accept that Jesus was one of the prophets who preceded Muhammad, but he is not the Son of God, and he will believe that Jesus did not die on the cross, as mentioned in the passage of the Koran 4,157 (Botelho, 2018: 05). Therefore, the criterion of the religious is not in the degree of historicity of an account, as they are not historians, but in the faith according to their ideological sympathy or their religious commitment. As we will see later, in addition to the Hindu version, Krishna also has a hostile version of his life and sayings, recorded in a collection known as Jaina Purānas (Jain Purānas), also called “Tradition Against Purāna”, where Krishna is belittled and humiliated (Cort, 1993: 185-206 and Jaini, 1993: 207-49). Also, Krishna is belittled in some Buddhist texts, just as Buddha is defamed in Bhāgavata Purāna XI.04.22, as a divine incarnation who came to deceive followers (see also: Agni Purāna 16.01-6). Finally, the accounts of religious texts are matters of faith and not matters of fact.

Changes after Compositions

According to the Textual Critique conclusions, in addition to the divergences in the original compositions mentioned above, religious texts also undergo changes after the compositions,

that is, during the period of oral or handwritten transmission, which results in the multiplicity of versions, revisions and editions. To cite just one example, one of the main and most extensive sources for knowledge of Kṛṣṇa's life is the Harivamsha, a hagiography in the form of a supplement (खिलपर्वन् - Khilaparvan) to the Mahābhārata, which Hindu tradition attributes authorship to K. D. Vyāsa, whose Vulgate version has the length of 16,374 verses, according to M. Winternitz, (1990: vol. I, 424) or 16,137 verses, according to Ekkehard Lorenz (2007: 95 and 107n4). However, during the collation process, for the preparation of the critical edition, P. L. Vaidya gathered 4 printed editions and 36 manuscripts in 8 different scripts for comparison, his critically reconstructed edition, published in 1969, totaled only 6073 verses in 118 chapters, that is, only those verses that were common in all editions and in all manuscripts were included. Therefore, about 10,000 verses, which were left out, must be interpolations later than the original composition (Vaidya, 1969: IX-XII; Lorenz, 2007: 95-7 and Brodbeck, 2019: 33). Distrust of interpolations is old, Maurice Winternitz pointed out his suspicions: "The Harivamsha is not the work of a single composer. The last third of it is certainly a late appendix to the appendix, and the remaining parts of the work are also pieces probably inserted later at quite different times" (Winternitz, 1990: vol. I, 424-5 - first edition 1907).

According to current Textual Criticism, the Purānas, from which we know the accounts of the life and sayings of Kṛṣṇa, especially the Bhāgavata Purāna book 10, the Viṣṇu Purāna book V and the Brahma Purāna 73-1-3, form an encyclopedic literature in which each work is the result of successive additions at different times. So that no Purana has a single date of composition, nor a single authorship, they are something like a huge encyclopedia, in which the episodes were successively added over many centuries, either during the period of oral transmission or of handwritten transmission.

The Difference between "Historicity" and "Belief in Historicity"

There are not a few who believe that if there are many who believe in the existence of a character, then that character really existed. Above all, if that highly regarded character appears in books, arts, prints, decorations, videos, commercials, movies, etc. The insistence and repetition of someone's media exposure can lead a naive person to believe that someone existed. These are the cases of children's belief in Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. Influenced by parents and the bombardment of the media, children believe these tales, until they are discredited by adults when they reach, as a general rule, early adolescence. This is because children do not know how to

differentiate “historicity” from “belief in historicity”. When the media is publicizing the arrival of Christmas or Easter, through the reproduction of images of Santa Claus and Easter Bunny respectively, it is not disclosing the historicity of these characters in the stories, but the belief in their existence, in a way that seems real, in order to strengthen the children's beliefs and, consequently, make these festive moments more alive within the families.

As we will discuss later, something similar happens in the minds of many Hindu authors and many supporters of Hinduism when they argue for Krshna's historicity. The simple fact that this character appears in extensive narratives in the sacred Hindu books (*Mahābhārata*, *Harivamsha* and *Purānas*), in ancient inscriptions, in countless works of art, in so many poems, in innumerable bas-reliefs in temples, in dance, in theater and even in cinema, it is enough argument to make one believe in Krshna's historicity. Some authors list extensive lists of ancient literary, epigraphic and artistic sources (Pusalker, 1955: 50-3), which only reproduce “beliefs in historicity”. Plenty of mentions do not necessarily attest to their veracity, the rumors are multipliable. What these media reproduce or exalt is, strictly speaking, the “belief in historicity” in Krshna, according to the time and place in India where these reproductions were created, but these are not definitively evidential documents that he existed, and if he existed, that everything that is

narrated, or reproduced, about him is strictly fact. Finally, the mere fact of “believing” in the existence of someone, and reproducing his belief through different media, is not proof that this someone actually existed in the past. Those who do this are just reproducing what they believe, or what others believe, and not attesting his historicity, so it is not a historical document, just a reproduction of credulity. What these records prove is only that, at the time they were created, Krshna was already believed and therefore worshiped as an important deity. For, in order to know if someone or a fact is historical or not, more historiographical or archaeological rigor is needed than the simple belief in his existence. This is a common symptom in the minds of religious delusionals, that is, to project their belief onto reality, that is, the real is what I believe.

The Main Sources for Knowledge of Krshna's Life

If all the references about this Hindu hero were gathered, the number of texts would be extensive. Many of them are only short mentions, such as the still-discussed passage from Chandogya Upanishad III.17.06: कृष्ण देवकीपुत्र - Krshna Devakīputra (Krshna, son of Devakī), who is actually the mother of Krshna (कृष्ण) mentioned in Hindu tradition. However, not all authors agree that this passage refers to the same Krshna portrayed in other Hindu traditions, despite the mention of

Devakīputra (son of Devakī), since, in the above passage, Kṛṣṇa is instructed by a teacher named Ghora Āṅgīrasa, whose mention does not appear in all of Kṛṣṇa's other extensive legends and hagiographies. Puranic tradition does not recognize Ghora Āṅgīrasa as the master of Kṛṣṇa. According to the Purāṇas, Kṛṣṇa was instructed by Sāṅdīpani Muni in his youth (Vishnu Purāṇa V.21.02-3), and Garga Muni was his family's guru (Pusalker, 1955: 57; Bryant, 2007: 4 and 16-7 and for more, see: Majumdar, 1969: 02-5).

The earliest reference to the word Kṛṣṇa (कृष्ण) appears in some passages of the Rg Veda, the oldest text in the Hindu tradition. However, it is clear that they do not refer to the divine Kṛṣṇa of the later tradition. The word Kṛṣṇa is mentioned as the color black in certain Vedic texts (Taittirīya Samhitā V.02.05.05 and Shatapatha Brāhmaṇa I.01.04.01), or as a demonic character, such as in Rg Veda VIII.85.13-5, in which one Kṛṣṇa, accompanied by ten thousand demons is defeated by the god Indra.

However, these mentions are not yet, obviously, to the divine Kṛṣṇa of the epic and Puranic traditions, as well as considered an incarnation (avatāra) of the god Vishnu of the later Vaiṣṇava religion. In chronological order, the main ancient and extensive sources for knowledge of Kṛṣṇa in the Hindu tradition are the Mahābhārata,

the Harivamsha³ and the Purānas (mainly the Bhāgavata Purāna book X, the Vishnu Purāna book V, and the Brahma Purāna 73-103). The first two already have critical editions; however, the Purānas do not, hence the diversity in the differences among the editions of the latter.⁴ Outside the Hindu tradition, the most extensive sources, although much shorter than the Hindu accounts, are the

³ Of these, the accounts in the Mahābhārata are the oldest. The accounts of Harivamsha are older than those of the Purānas. One clue, among others, for the identification of the greater antiquity of the Harivamsha, in relation to the Purānas, is the much smaller amount of compound words that exceed the limits of the size of the pāda (foot) in the verse, that is, a compound word has the its beginning in one pāda and the end of the compound word extends to the beginning of the next pāda, that is, a compound word starts in one pāda and ends in the other. The use of long compounds that go beyond the limits of the pāda started to happen from the first centuries of the Common Era, as they were not frequent in Sanskrit texts prior to this time. Edwin F. Bryant claimed to have found only four instances of pāda boundary extrapolation by compound words in the entire text of the critical edition of Harivamsha. Already in Book 10 of the Bhāgavata Purāna, he counted the occurrence of 303 cases and in the entire text of the Brahma Purāna, he found 93 cases (Bryant, 2007: 108n22).

⁴ For the diversity in the Purāna's recensions, see: Rocher, 1986: 59-67. A few publications of the Purānas, either in the Sanskrit text or in translations, are based on collating only a few manuscripts, very different from the wide and diverse collating of many manuscripts during the work of preparation for the critical edition of the Mahābhārata and the Harivamsha, by Bhadarkar Oriental Research Institute.

Buddhist Ghata Jātaka and the following Jain texts: the Uttarādhyayana Sūtra XXII, the Jaina Harivamshapurāṇa, and the Pāṇḍavapurāṇa.

The art sculptures that reproduce episodes from Kṛṣṇa's life are not sources of knowledge about his life, in the strict sense, since they are reproductions of traditions known by artists and believed by devotees at the time of the creation of the work. Therefore, strictly speaking, the source is the tradition, whether oral or written, and not the work of art itself.

As commonly found, versions can vary from one tradition to another, even within the same religion. The same myth can appear in two versions, but with different characters and protagonists. For example, in the Purāṇas, myths appear, whose script is the same, but in a Shivaist Purāṇa, the hero is Shiva, while in a Vishnuist Purāṇa, with the same story, the hero is Vishnu. Alternatively, data about the same myth can vary markedly. For example, the interpolated verses of the Mahābhārata in some manuscripts claim that Kṛṣṇa lived 105 years, but calculations from the epic's own data indicate that he only lived 93 years. The Vishnu Purāṇa (V.37.18) mentions that Kṛṣṇa lived more than 100 years and for the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (XI.06.25) he lived to the age of 125 years. (Majumdar, 1969: 34). Despite the differences in the above ages, Kṛṣṇa lived a longer life than some of the best-known leaders of the great religions, such as Jesus (33 years old), than Muhammad (62 years old), than Confucius (70

years old), Mahāvīra (72 years old)⁵ and Buddha (80 years old). In addition, disagreements in details such as in Harivamsha 48.21, it is Vasudeva himself, Kṛṣṇa's father, who informs the cruel king Kamsa that his wife Devakī has given birth to a child. However, in Vishnu Purāṇa V.03.02 and Bhāgavata Purāṇa X.04.01, it is the prison guards who inform the king of the birth of Devakī's child.

Furthermore, among those who admit the historicity of Kṛṣṇa, there is a hitherto unresolved controversy over the date on which this Hindu hero lived. In order to determine the date, some speculators propose that we should base ourselves on the date of occurrence of the Mahābhārata war. However, guesses about the dates are so diverse that Bimanbehari Majumdar needed a 35-page chapter to analyze these controversies (Majumdar 1969: 01-35). The suggested dates of the occurrence of the Mahābhārata war have a distant variation, which goes from the year 3102 b.c.e., until the fourth century b.c.e., intermediated by a huge number of other hypothetical dates (Bryant, 2007: 05). In addition, these suggestions are based on data from mentions in texts and on inscriptions composed many centuries after the likely occurrence of the war, when, most likely, knowledge

⁵ This is the age attributed by the Jain sect Shwetāmbara, the rival sect, the Dīghanbara, claims that he only lived to the age of 55, i.e., instead of passing away in 527 b.c.e., he died in 510 b.c.e.

about this event had already evolved in the mist of mythology. One researcher concluded that “the Kali era⁶ was invented by Hindu astronomers and chronologists for calculation purposes, but this only came some thirty-six centuries after the starting point they ascribe to it” (Majumdar, 1969: 07). The fact that Krshna is reported in many ancient texts and mentioned in many ancient inscriptions, as well as reproduced in artistic sculptures, even before the first century b.c.e., is only proof that Krshna, in that antiquity, had already been elevated to the status of a deity. , but it is not proof of its existence, that is, just that the belief in its divinity was already popular among Hindus since those times.

If we believe the accounts reproduced in Hindu literature, Krshna was not the same from the beginning; researchers see a gradual progress in his ascension to divinity, from the figure of a demon enemy of Indra in the Rg Veda, to his apex as the Supreme Divinity, in the parts interpolated later in the epic and in the Purānas. For example, A. D. Pusalker listed the following growth stages in Mahābhārata:

1. In the earliest parts of this epic, Krshna is represented as a human hero, a religious teacher, and an advisor to the Pāndavas.

⁶ The Bhagavata Purana XII.02.33 states that the Kali Yuga began with Krshna's death.

2. In the later interpolated parts, he is gradually elevated to the status of deity, as a partial and semi-divine incarnation of Vishnu.
3. In the last interpolated parts, he becomes the Supreme God, the full incarnation of Vishnu, and finally identified with Brahman (the Absolute).

A similar development also takes place in the purāṇas, in which Kṛṣṇa is an Yādava hero, who spent his childhood in Gokula and then moved to Dwākarā, finally being deified as an incarnation of Vishnu-Nārāyaṇa. Also, in a later passage, this same author noted: "It is only in later legends, colored with mythology, that Kṛṣṇa is treated as a divine being, and the conclusions that Kṛṣṇa was not a human hero, but a solar deity or a deity of vegetation, are based on later legends, as the result of seeing history from the wrong end" (Pusalker, 1955: 51-2 and 56). That is, it is as if, instead of understanding the story of Kṛṣṇa from the perspective of beginning, middle and end, it would be like understanding it only from the perspective of its end. In short, absurd as it may seem to a devotee, Kṛṣṇa may have been a human hero in the distant past, but his deification is an invention of subsequent generations.

The Fantastic High Content of Hagiographies

The accounts of Kṛṣṇa's life are so fanciful that they sometimes mix myths with fables, that is, human characters interact with animal characters. A

fabulous example is the episode known as "The Tale of the Syamantaka Jewel", in which one of Krshna's many wives was Jāmbavatī, daughter of the king of bears (ऋक्षराज - rsharāja), known as Jāmbavān (or Jāmbavat), so he married with a bear's daughter (ऋक्ष - rsha). The account of how Krshna obtained Jāmbavatī is narrated in Bhāgavata Purāna X.56.01-32, in Vishnu Purāna IV.13, in Harivamsha 28.01-29, and briefly in Agni Purāna 275.40-4, with differences in details. The jewel had been stolen by a lion (केशरीन् – kesharīn),⁷ so the king of bears, Jāmbavān, killed the lion and stole the jewel. Upon learning of what had happened, Krshna went to the hole (cave) (बिलं – bilam)⁸ where the bear Jāmbavāt dwelt, fought with him for twenty-one days, and finally retrieved the jewel. In recognition of the defeat, Jāmbavān gave his daughter Jāmbavatī in marriage to Krshna. Anyway, Krshna had so many wives that he even

⁷ In Bhāgavata Purāna X.56.14, the word for "lion" is kesharīn (केशरीन्), while in Harivamsha 28.15; the word for lion is simha (सिंह).

⁸ The neuter noun bilam (बिलं) is translated "cave" in this episode by the translators. However, although the word bilam also means, "cave", this is a euphemistic translation in order to minimize the wild meaning of the characters in this tale, since the most common meanings are "hole", "cavity", "pit", "crack", and "lair", meanings that are more appropriate for the place of permanence of animals. It is derived from the verb root बिल् - bil, "to separate", "to split" or "to divide". (Apte, 1978: 701 and Spokensanskrit.org).

married a bear (ऋक्ष – rkshā).⁹ Now imagine the embrace of a bear during her honeymoon, which fact, if we are to believe the account, may have occurred because the Vishnu Purāṇa (V.32.01 and 35.01) mentions that she had a son with Kṛṣṇa named Shāmba.

Some marriages of Kṛṣṇa are narrated in Bhāgavata Purāṇa X.58. In one of them, he married a young woman named Kālindī, who told him that he resides in a mansion built by his father under the waters of the river Yamunā, and that she intended to remain there until she saw the immortal Kṛṣṇa (v.58.22). In another, he forcibly took away the young Mitravindā, his paternal aunt's daughter, therefore his first cousin; during a swayamvara (pre-wedding) ceremony while all the kings remained watching (X.58.31). At the end of the chapter, it is mentioned that he had thousands of other wives (X.58.58).

It is not only with animals that humans interact in the Purāṇas, but also with elements of nature. In a passage in Vishnu Purana V.21.04, the sea speaks. After being instructed by master Sāṇḍīpani, Kṛṣṇa and two young yadavas offered him a payment in recompense. The master accepted and asked them to retrieve his son who drowned at sea. Kṛṣṇa and the youth marched

⁹ The Brahma Purana 95.12-8 mentions that Kṛṣṇa married 16,100 virgins by taking various forms; however, each wife considered that Kṛṣṇa had only married her.

towards the ocean and, arriving there, the sea told them, "I did not kill Sandīpani's son, it was a demon named Panchajana, who lives in the shape of a shell, the size of a boy, and he still is under my waters". In passages like these, it is possible to perceive the high degree of imaginativeness of the Puranic myths.

More than in the accounts of the lives of other more recent religious leaders (Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed), the separation of myth and possibly history in Krshna's hagiographies becomes more difficult, not to say that it may be impossible, due to the greater antiquity of the probable period in which this Hindu hero lived, as well as the greater absence of contemporary and impartial documents, as well as archaeological and epigraphic remains, duly recognized as historical, which forces exclusive reliance on confessional accounts by religious. Therefore, the construction of a project "In Search of Historical Krshna", as it exists for other religious visionaries, does not have the same impetus as other current projects, due to the greater difficulty, hence the scarcity of critical studies on the subject matter. The reason is clear, Krshna is shrouded in such spectacular myths and feats, in such a dense and engaging way, that it is much more difficult to filter out his historicity than in the accounts of other characters, that is, his accounts are flattering and too fanciful to be taken as historical. Furthermore, the apologetic character of the texts is very extravagant; Krshna is always victorious, never

defeated, even at times when he performed reprehensible actions, such as butter theft, environmental disaster, malicious tricks during battle and countless murders, his abuses are approved.

Furthermore, another difficulty is that, in addition to the doubt about the historicity of Kṛṣṇa, all the other contemporary characters around him do not have confirmed historicity, so they are all also shrouded in the same dense fog of fictionality. Unlike other characters with dubious historicity, but with the historicity of his contemporaries, as well as events, duly proven, Kṛṣṇa's life lacks all of these. For example, the historicity of Jesus can be questioned, or even the veracity of some of the accounts of his life and his sayings, but we cannot question the historicity of some of his contemporary characters and of some events from that time, such as Pontius Pilate, Herod and the crucifixion (a frequent practice in the Roman Empire), hence it is easier to locate the time, if the historicity in which Jesus lived is confirmed. In Kṛṣṇa's life, none of this is available, when we apply historical rigors, nor are there archaeological and epigraphic traces that are not naively based on the "belief" in his historicity, recorded many centuries later, despite the contrary arguments of the defenders of his historicity, as we will see later.

In addition, a recurrent fact is the habit, very common among defenders of the historicity of Kṛṣṇa, which, in a way, is more than a confessional

vice, of considering that the mere reference to Krshna in Hindu works is an example of his existence, without first proving whether this is really a historical reference or a mythological reference. For, firstly, it is necessary to prove whether the passage is historical, as the religious authority of a work does not necessarily imply its historical authority, that is, it is not for the reason that a work is canonized by religion that it necessarily reproduces historical facts, which deals with real characters and facts. In other words, when we find the mention of someone or a fact in an ancient religious work, we must be careful to know how to identify if it is not a reference to an even older story, which, at the time of the composition of the work later, which mentions this someone or this fact, had already become a consolidated belief in this character or in this fact accepted as a true fact. Otherwise, we will return to the question of the aforementioned confusion between “historicity” and “belief in historicity”, whose difference is very great. A very common mess in religious circles.

Also, in many of these ancient Hindu works, believed by defenders of the historicity of Krshna as historical documents, the authorship is not known, the time when they were written is not known. At most, only approximate dates surrounded by controversy, as the tradition has altered the text since the oral composition to the written record, nor is the autograph manuscript known, in order to know how much has been changed from the original

composition to the current edition, the location of the composition, as well as whether they are original compositions or compilations of traditions and, what is disadvantageous for the research, the great amount of lost works, whose citations exist but are no longer found, which could contain contrary information. Therefore, therefore, they are references to characters and facts in works that carry with them all these omissions and these problems above, so these works are only believed and used in courses in Hinduism or among adherents and sympathizers of Hinduism, by trained religious teachers, and never in history courses with both secular teachers and students. In short, only adherents and professors of Hinduism believe that these works are not mythological, but that, on the contrary, they reproduce reliably historical facts.

Therefore, in the following paragraphs, we will show and analyze this difficulty, in the main Hindu apologies: Mahābhārata, Harivamsha and Purānas, as well as the derogatory and sometimes hostile reports preserved in Buddhist and Jain texts, the latter forming something like a set of “counter-hagiographies”.

Krshna's Birth

This episode is narrated to a lesser extent and detail in Vishnu Purāna V.03 and in more detail in Harivamsha 48 (CE) and Bhāgavata Purāna X.03-05. The versions coincide and, at the same

time, they diverge in some points. Kṛṣṇa's birth is a miraculous and spectacular event, his survival of the wrath of the cruel king Kamsa, who was determined to kill all of Devakī's children, so he kept her prisoner in his palace, along with her husband Vasudeva, the biological parents of Kṛṣṇa, according to the prophecy that a son of Devakī would kill King Kamsa, was a successful act of trickery, with the aid of the goddess Yoganidrā (goddess of sleep) and with the assent of the celestial gods.

According to the coincident accounts in the three versions quoted above, Devakī and Yashodā conceived on the same day, so the eighth son of Devakī (Kṛṣṇa) and the daughter of Yashodā were born in the same night and at the same time (midnight). During the imprisonment, the seven previous sons of Devakī were killed by King Kamsa, fearing that one of them might be the one to kill him. On the night of the birth of both babies, the goddess Yoganidrā put the palace guards to sleep, so Vasudeva took the newborn Kṛṣṇa, took him to the village, unnoticed, found the also the newborn daughter of Yashodā, took her away from the cradle, put Kṛṣṇa in her place and took Yashodā's daughter to the palace and placed her in Devakī's arms, thus performing an exchange of babies, in order to convey the idea that, this time, Devakī's baby was a daughter, and no longer a son, which would prevent death by King Kamsa. Upon learning of another birth, Kamsa immediately ran to Devakī's

cell and asked to examine the baby, realizing then that this time it was a daughter, so it would not justify her death, he avoided executing her. Through this ploy of exchanging babies, Kṛṣṇa survived and was raised by his adoptive parents Nanda and Yaśodā in the village of Gokula.

The intriguing thing about this episode is that it is one of many who portrays the ineptitude in some passages of the myths. For, to prevent the prophecy of his death, through a son of Devakī, from being fulfilled, Kamsa did not need to kill each of Devakī's children that was born, it would be enough to keep her and her husband in separate places, in order for her does not conceive, then deaths would be unnecessary. Unbelievable that King Kamsa had no such idea, or that no one at court had suggested it to him.

Comic Miracles in Childhood

Some episodes in Kṛṣṇa's life are so fanciful that they are comical, which reminds us of the comic miracles in Jesus' childhood, recorded in a set of apocryphal texts known as "Infancy Gospels of Jesus" (see: Ehrman, 2011: 03-193). The difference between both accounts is that the latter were not canonized by the dominant Church, as the bishops understand that the gospels are historical texts, so these would seem ridiculous. Whereas, the texts' accounts of Kṛṣṇa's childhood were recognized by Hinduism, but with less historical

significance, through the understanding that these extravagant miracles carried metaphysical meanings.

Of the miracles of Jesus in childhood, the following episodes, drawn mainly from the Arab Infancy Gospel and the Infancy Gospel by Thomas the Israelite, are particularly comical:

1. Jesus speaks in the cradle as a baby:

In chronological order, Jesus' first miracle happened when he was just born, still a baby in the cradle, when he spoke to his mother; "I, who was born of you, am Jesus, the Son of God, the Word, as the angel Gabriel announced to you, and my Father sent me for the salvation of the world" (Arabic Infancy Gospel, chap. I; Platt Jr., 1926: 38). This miracle is mentioned in Qur'an XIX, 30-1, but with a different wording.¹⁰

2. Board measurement was no problem:

Jesus' father was a carpenter and used to make plows and yokes. He received a request from a rich man to make a bed. However, when the measurement of one of the cross beams got too small, he did not know what to do. The infant Jesus told his father, "Place the two pieces of wood on the floor and line them up from the middle to the end". Joseph did so, just as the child said. Then Jesus

¹⁰ The best-known talking baby work in the entertainment world is the trilogy "Look Who's Talking" (1989), "Look Who's Talking Too" (1990) and "Look Who's Talking Now" (1993), three comedies that reached hit during the VHS boom of the 1990s, starring Kirstie Alley, John Travolta and George Segal.

stood at the other end, took the shorter plank and stretched it until it was the same length as the other (Infant Gospel by Thomas, Ch. 13; Elliott, 1993: 78 and Ehrman, 2003: 60-1). Something as though the board were a rubber that stretches but does not return to its previous state.

3. The clay statues:

When Jesus was seven years old, he was playing one day with other children of his own age. For fun, they made out of clay images of animals, such as wolves, donkeys, birds, and each praised their own work, striving to make it better than those of their followers do. Then Jesus said to the other children, I will command the clay statues that I made to walk and they will walk. Then Jesus ordered the images to walk and they immediately walked. When he ordered them back, they came back. He had made statues of birds that flew when he ordered them to fly and stopped when he told them to stop, and when he gave them food and drink, they drank and ate (Arabic Infant Gospel; Platt Jr., 1926: 52-3)

4. Jesus, soothsayer dyer:

One day, when he was playing and running with other children, Jesus passed a dyer's shop called Salem. In this shop, there were fabrics that belonged to a large number of inhabitants of the city, and which Salem was preparing to dye in various colors. Once Jesus entered the store, he took all the fabrics and threw them into the boiler. Salem was terrified and said: "What have you done, O son of

Mary? You harmed me and my clients". Therefore, Jesus replied, "Any fabric that wants to change the color I change". And he removed the fabrics from the boiler, and each one was dyed the color the dyer desired. (Arabic Infant Gospel; Platt Jr., 1926: 53).

5. The snake explosion:

Joseph sent his son James to gather firewood and bring it home. Jesus accompanied him. While James was gathering firewood, a snake bit his hand. When he was stretched out on the ground to die, Jesus appeared and blew the bite. The pain immediately passed, the snake exploded, and James regained health (Gospel of Jesus' Childhood by Thomas, Ch. 16; Elliott, 1993: 79 and Ehrman, 2003: 61).

6. Jesus resurrects a boy to be exonerated:

Jesus was playing on the terrace of a house and one of the children, with whom he was playing, fell off the terrace and died. When the other children saw what had happened, they fled, so Jesus remained there alone. When the parents of the boy who fell arrived, they accused Jesus. However, Jesus said, "I didn't push him". But they started to accuse him publicly. Therefore, Jesus went to the injured boy's spot and in a loud voice shouted, "Zenon (that was the boy's name) get up and tell me, did I push you?" The boy immediately stood up and said, "No, you didn't push me, but you raised me". When others saw this, they were impressed (Gospel of Jesus's Childhood by Thomas, Ch. 09; Elliott, 1993: 78 and Ehrman, 2003: 60).

7. Miracle to make up for an oversight:

When Jesus was six years old, his mother gave him a jar to fetch water for his home. However, he stumbled into the crowd and the jar broke. Then Jesus opened the cloak he was wearing and filled it with water, carrying the water to his mother (Gospel of Jesus' Childhood by Thomas, Ch. 11; Elliott, 1993: 78 and Ehrman, 2003: 60).

8. The unexpected carpenter Joseph is helped once more by Jesus:

One day the king of Jerusalem sent for him and said; "I want, Joseph, that you make me a throne according to the dimensions of the place where I usually sit". Joseph obeyed, and setting to work, spent two years in the palace to build the throne. In addition, when it was put in place, they noticed that on each side it was two hands short of the fixed measure. Then the king became angry with Joseph, who, fearing the monarch's anger could not eat and went to bed fasting. Then, Jesus asked him what was the cause of his fear, and he replied, "It is because the work that I worked for two years is lost". Moreover, Jesus answered him: "Don't be afraid and don't lose your courage, take this side of the throne and I the other, so that we can give you the exact measure". In addition, Joseph, having done what Jesus had asked of him, and each one pulling to one side, the throne obeyed and was exactly in the desired dimension (Arabic Gospel of Childhood; Platt Jr., 1926: 53-4)

Some of the most comical miracles in Kṛṣṇa's childhood are as follows:

1. Speech right after birth:

Kṛṣṇa spoke as a newborn. Shortly after his birth, before the exchange with the daughter of Yaśodā and Nanda, he spoke thus to his mother (Devakī): “Princess, in former times I was praised by you and adored in the hope that you would have a son, your supplications were answered, for I was born your son” (Vishnu Purāṇa, V.03.01). In the Brahma Purana 73.18, the speech is as follows: “Before, O gentle lady, I was praised by thee, desirous of a son. Since I was now born from your womb, your prayer became fruitful”. In Bhāgavata Purāṇa X.03.32-45, he also spoke to his mother Devakī, soon after birth, but transfigured into the divine form of Vishnu, through a longer text, i.e. 14 verses, where he recalls his previous incarnations and those of his parents Vasudeva and Devakī in past ages, reporting the names of their parents on those occasions. After speaking, he returns to the form of a human baby.

2. The overturning of the cart when a baby in the crib:

On one occasion, Kṛṣṇa was left by one of his mothers, Yaśodā,¹¹ lying in his cradle sleeping under a cart. Eager to suckle, Kṛṣṇa kicked and kicked the cart, which toppled over and remained

¹¹ Kṛṣṇa was Devakī's biological son, but his foster mother was Yaśodā.

upside down. The circumstances of this event diverge in Harivamsha 50.04-29 (Critical Edition) and Bhāgavata Purāna X.07.04-11. In the first one, Yashodā left baby Kṛṣṇa under the cart to go to the river Yamunā to bathe (Harivamsha, 50.04 – Critical Edition). In Bhāgavata P. X.07, the event took place during the celebration of Kṛṣṇa's Utthāna ceremony,¹² when Yashodā, busy with the ceremony guests, did not hear Kṛṣṇa's cries desiring to nurse. By the way, the order is narrated in reverse, since, in Harivamsha, the episode of the overturning of the cart is narrated before the episode of the murder of the demon Pūtanā, whereas in Bhāgavata Purāna it is the opposite. The Brahma Purana follows the order of the latter.

3. The murder of the Pūtanā she-devil:

In the version of Harivamsha 50.20-9 (Critical Edition), the she-devil Pūtanā appeared to baby Kṛṣṇa at midnight while the others were sleeping, disguised as a bird. She offered her breast;¹³ Kṛṣṇa sucked her breast, but also her life, immediately the bird fell to the ground dead. In the

¹² This is a ceremony, known as Utthāna, to celebrate the baby's first attempt to move into the prone position in order to try to stand upright in the crib for the first time.

¹³ A bird with a breast exists only in the fantasy of the myths, since birds are not mammal animals, but oviparous, therefore they do not have a breast for offspring suckling. Perhaps, the alteration in the version of Bhāgavata Purāna, a beautiful young woman in place of a bird, was made to correct the physiological comics of the mention of a bird with a breast.

Bhāgavata Purāna X.6 version, the she-devil Pūtānā, the evil child-killing soul, wandering in search of babies, appeared in Gokula in the form of a beautiful and charming young woman, enchanting everyone. By chance, she found Kṛṣṇa's abode, lying in bed. The she-devil put him in her lap and nursed him with her breast full of poisoned milk. Nevertheless, Kṛṣṇa squeezed her breast with his hands and sucked the milk along with her life. Unable to bear the pain, she screamed in despair and then dropped dead.

Curious to know is the superstitious disgusting rite performed by his family shortly after this episode in order to ensure Kṛṣṇa's protection from other evil spirits. This is the ceremony of shaking the tail of the cow (गोपुच्छ-gopuccha) around the child. During this unhealthy rite, Kṛṣṇa was bathed in cow urine (गोमूत्र-gomūtra) and smeared with powder from the hooves of the same cow's paws, as well as applying cow dung (गोशकृत्-goshakṛt) to twelve different parts of the body, accompanied by the pronunciation of twelve names of the Lord, such as a spiritual talisman (Bhāgavata Purāna X.06.19-20 and briefly in Brahma Purāna 75.12-3).

4. The destruction of the two Arjuna trees:

This tale is narrated in more details in Harivamsha 50.13-37 (Critical Edition). Kṛṣṇa's foster mother Yashodā, tired of the mischief of her now grown son, decided to tie him with a rope to his

belly and thereby tie him to a mortar so that he would remain quiet. The child managed to drag the mortar across the yard, laughing and running in such a way that the mortar caught on two Arjuna trees and knocked them down. The villagers were surprised by the miracle, since there had been no gales, storms, lightning strikes, passage of angry elephants, etc. How could a child cut down two trees that huge? These were two wish-granting trees, so the villagers mourned the destruction of the trees. In fact, they were two siddhas incarnated in the form of two trees. The lesson in the tale is a foreshadowing of Kṛṣṇa's future teachings; the reason for destroying the wish-granting trees is the guidance to eliminate selfish desires, so emphasized in Bhagavad Gītā.

5. The raising of Govardhana Mountain for seven days with just one hand:

Hearing of the cancellation of his festival by the villagers of Gokula, Indra (Shakra) became enraged and ordered his host of charged clouds, who carries out the destruction of the universe, to pour a torrential rain on the village in order to destroy it. In doing so, a huge flood occurred, causing a major environmental disaster, with the destruction of plants and animals. In desperation, the villagers, trembling with fear, turned to Kṛṣṇa for help, who, realizing that Indra was behind this disaster became enraged and decided to protect the villagers as well as their property and herds. To avoid the violent gale and torrential rain, he, though

a child, uprooted the Govardhana Mountain, raised it from the surface, placed it above the village and, like a giant mushroom,¹⁴ ordered all the villagers, with their goods and their herds, were placed below the raised mountain, in order to protect themselves from the wind and rain. Kṛṣṇa remained lifting this mountain for seven days with only his left hand, without moving from his position, until the storm stopped. On the other hand, during the lifting of the surface, the mountain revealed deposits of silver and gold (Harivamsha, 61.37).

This episode is narrated in Bhāgavata Purāṇa X.25, Viṣṇu Purāṇa V.11 and Harivamsha 61 (EC), the narrative of this latter text is longer and more detailed, with divergences between the three narratives at some points. The Viṣṇu Purāṇa narrative is a summary of the Bhāgavata narrative and the latter in turn is a summary of the Harivamsha narrative or, conversely, the latter is an extension of the two other narratives. The common repetitions and verses in these three works indicate that they were taken from a common traditional source (Tagare, 1988: 1416n1). Now, the question, what is it possible to extract from the history of these episodes so fanciful?

¹⁴ The Viṣṇu Purāṇa V.11.01 compares with an “umbrella”.

The Three Krishnas Hypothesis

Among those who believe in the complete historicity of Kṛṣṇa, meaning that everything in the accounts are historical facts, from beginning to end, are those who defend the existence of three different Kṛṣṇas: (1) the Kṛṣṇa of the Purāṇas (and the Harivamśa), (2) the Kṛṣṇa of the Mahābhārata and (3) the Kṛṣṇa of Bhagavad Gītā (and also, that of the Anugītā), due to the great differences in personality and behaviors, as well as in the history of these three Kṛṣṇas. In the Mahābhārata, Kṛṣṇa's childhood and youth is not mentioned, at the first apparition he appears already as an adult. The oldest Purāṇas do not mention the connection between Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇdavas, as it is central in the Mahābhārata, just as the war in Kurukshetra is not mentioned in the Purāṇas. In addition, the high level of morality of Kṛṣṇa's teachings in the Bhagavad Gītā contrasts with his tricks and deceptions performed elsewhere in the Mahābhārata. The Harivamśa deals with episodes from Kṛṣṇa's life that are omitted from the Mahābhārata, although a few passages in this last text make references to episodes from Kṛṣṇa's childhood and youth. Hindu tradition holds that the Harivamśa and the Purāṇas were composed in order to reveal what the Mahābhārata omitted.

Also, the suggestion that the libertine and libidinous Kṛṣṇa of the Purāṇas and the Harivamśa, through their loving relationships with

the Gopīs (cowgirls of Gokula), cannot be the same person as the friend and advisor of the Pāṇdavas of the Mahābhārata, still less the same person as the great wisdom master of the Bhagavad Gītā and the Anugītā.

However, this hypothesis is not shared by all defenders of historicity. Most believers in the historicity of Kṛṣṇa believe that all of these are just one Kṛṣṇa, but with episodes and aspects of his life narrated in different texts, because of their length. The diversities between morality and cheating are examples of the different ways in which the deity acts in different circumstances.

Perhaps the most reasonable explanation for these differences in the narratives about Kṛṣṇa's different behaviors is the fact that these texts, Mahābhārata, Harivamśa and Purāṇas, have been so interpolated, for many centuries, by so many different authors, so many times that, with the over time, the narratives were increasingly multiplying, in such a way that contradictions appeared, thus losing the homogeneity of the initial narrative. The suggestion of reconstruction of what is purely historical in Kṛṣṇa's life by A. D. Pusalker (1955: 67-74), excluding what is mythology, is problematic, as many of the accounts are still too mythological to be considered historical. He included as historicity the prophecy of the death of King Kamsa by the eighth son of Devakī, the exchange of babies at the birth of Kṛṣṇa that Vasudeva (Kṛṣṇa's father) managed to reach

Gokula, to exchange babies, with the help of the guards of the prison dissatisfied with the tyranny of Kamsa. He also included as history the miracle of Krshna's overturning the cart as a baby, Krshna's destruction of the two arjuna trees by Krshna tied to the mortar as a child and the raising of Govardhana Mountain as extraordinary miraculous means. He also considered the great battle of Kurukshetra as a historical fact, but pointed out the many differences as to the date of occurrence (1955:74).¹⁵ Most of the events he took from the Mahābhārata, since this is the least mythological text (especially the critical edition) among all those relating to Krshna, as you can see when we compare them.

Bankimchandra Chatterjee's Pioneering (1838-94)

He was the first Indian author to undertake a critical study of the life of Krshna, starting from the criticism of the Mahābhārata and the Purānas introduced by European researchers in the 19th century. His critical skill in the work *Krshna Caritra* (first edition 1886 and 2nd edition 1892)¹⁶ made it a classic of Bengali literature and then encouraged

¹⁵ The date most suggested by the Hindu tradition is 3102 b.c.e., despite the enormous controversy among researchers.

¹⁶ First edition: 198 pages and Second edition: 522 pages.

the realization of a few later critical works on the life of this Hindu deity.

He wrote his critical comments with Indian nationalism as a background. For him, Kṛṣṇa was the perfect embodiment of the best ideals of humanity. He used the example of Kṛṣṇa as a way to encourage nationalism; Kṛṣṇa was the hero capable of arousing this feeling in Indians. For him, Kṛṣṇa, according to the *Mahābhārata*, was a visionary statesman bent on achieving the unity of India. In addition, that the earliest account of Kṛṣṇa's life is in the epic, so events that are not reported in this text should be dismissed as mere poetic fantasies (Majumdar 1969: 233-4).

He was not the first, but he emphasized the existence of many interpolations in the *Mahābhārata*. In the first edition of his work (1886), he stated that the verses referring to Kṛṣṇa's life in *Vṛndāvana* were interpolations, and that the love affairs of Kṛṣṇa and the *Gopīs* were all unfounded, they were mere products of the fanciful imagination of the authors of the *Purāṇas*. He went even further by claiming in the first edition that the story of Kṛṣṇa's transfer to Nanda's residence at midnight, as well as all events relating to childhood and adolescence in *Vraja* were false and unfounded, he even denied that Kamsa was Kṛṣṇa's maternal uncle (Majumdar 1969: 235). However, he changed his mind in the second edition (1892). In the latter, he went on to admit that the transference of Kṛṣṇa to Gokula by his father Vasudeva could be accepted

as a historical fact, but he denied that the hero could steal butter in childhood. The miracle of the raising of Govardhana Mountain by Krshna, with only one hand for seven days, in order to protect Gokula's herdsmen from the torrential rain sent by Indra, was also admitted by him as historical.¹⁷ In addition, the miraculous event of Krshna's overturning of a chariot, as a baby in the cradle,¹⁸ he judged as a mere allegory.

The conclusion Bankimchandra drew as to the credibility of the events of Krshna's childhood and youth was that his father Vasudeva sent his wife Rohini and the two children, Krshna and Balarāma, to Gokula out of fear of King Kamsa, and that Krshna spent his childhood and your adolescence

¹⁷ The episode is narrated in Bhāgavata Purāna X.25, Vishnu Purāna V.11 and Harivamsha 61 (Critical Edition). It was later expanded and further embellished in other poetic versions of this episode by Vaishnava devotees. The presence of common verses and the repetition of identical phrases in these three sources indicate that the authors used a common traditional source.

¹⁸ Bhagavata Purana X.07.04-8. For unreligious, miracles performed by babies are comical. Quran XIX.29-33 mentions a miracle of Jesus as a baby in the cradle, in which he says: "I am the servant of God. He has given me scripture, made me a prophet, made me blessed. He asked me to pray, give alms my whole life, love my mother. Peace was with me the day I was born, it will be with me the day I die and the day I rise to life". This same miracle appears, with a different wording, in an apocryphal gospel known as the Arabic Childhood Gospel § 01 (Botelho, 2018: 04).

there. His beauty and grace made him a dear to everyone. He grew up as an exceptionally vigorous young man who saved cowboys by destroying dangerous animals. He was affectionate to the boys and girls, as well as trying to please them. Bankimchandra realized a real spiritual truth in Kṛṣṇa's adolescence. This was all he admitted as historical facts, even so, with great hesitation (Majumdar 1969: 239).

As for life after youth, Bankimchandra considered it an extreme impossibility that Kṛṣṇa had married the daughter of a bear, as for him these episodes of Kṛṣṇa's multiple marriages are late interpolations and not part of the original story (Majumdar, 1969: 243). In addition, for him, Kṛṣṇa had only one wife, and that was Rukminī, because his son Pradyumna and his grandson Aniruddha appear in history and his great-grandson Vajra became king (Majumdar 1969: 244).

Anyway, there is no need to delve into Bankimchandra Chatterjī's opinions here, nor to mention the contestations of opponents of his ideas, but it was only worth recording his pioneering work of pointing out what could be history and what could be myth in the reports of Kṛṣṇa's life, since he wrote at a time when suspicions of interpolations in the works of Hinduism were still beginning, but the work of extensive collation of manuscripts and editions for the preparation of critical editions had not yet begun. Therefore, he was not familiar with the critical editions of the Mahābhārata and the

Harivamsha (Vaidya, 1969 and Brodbeck, 2019), nor the semi-critical editions of the Purāṇas as they are available today.

The Most Common Pro-historical Arguments

1) For believers in historicity, the concept of Kṛṣṇa as a myth is an invention of British colonizers, especially Christian missionaries and European researchers in the 19th century, because before their arrivals, no Hindu suspected his historicity, it was a unanimity. The apologists' argument is that foreign missionaries could not agree with the antiquity of India, as mentioned in Hindu literature, beyond the year 5000 b.c.e., as biblical calculations attributed the beginning of the world to the year 4004 b.c.e., so everything before this last date would have to be myth.

Comment: Firstly, it should be noted that Christian missionaries did not undertake the work of inventing mythologies in the Hindu religion, although many of the early investigators were Christian missionaries, they were also admirers of Hindu culture. What European researchers did was to introduce a new rational and historical method of researching Indian texts, based on Textual Criticism, Philology and Literary History. Secondly, invention is different from discovery. For example, the fact that almost everyone previously believed that the Sun revolved around the Earth does not make Copernicus the “inventor” of heliocentrism, whose phenomenon has

existed since the beginning of the formation of the Solar System. What he did was to introduce a new method of astronomical research that led him to conclude that the Earth revolved around the Sun. Likewise, the fact that all Hindus "believed" before that Kṛṣṇa was a historical character does not mean that the introduction of a new method of research into Hindu history and literature, which led to the revelation that many episodes, which were previously believed to be historical, showed their mythological character, was an "invention" by European researchers, that is, the fact already existed. In other words, this new method of research led to many discoveries of facts that already existed but which the Hindus did not realize, due to the dazzling veneration to their gods.

2) Another argument is that Indians have an ancient and diverse tradition of records of historical events, something like historiographical literature. Some authors even enroll a list of 22 genres of historiographical texts, some of the best known being the Itihāsa (the epics: Rāmāyana and Mahābhārata), the Purāṇa (the 18 Mahāpurāṇas and the 18 Upapurāṇas), the Charitra (or Charita, such as the Buddhacharita of Ashwaghoshā), the Avadāna, the Kathā, the Gāthā and others lesser known.

Comment: Discussing the historiographical or mythological character of each of these genres of texts would require many pages here. We have already discussed the mythological character of the

Mahābhārata, the Harivamsha and the Purānas in earlier pages. However, what can be said, in general, in a nutshell, about all these genres of texts, supposedly considered historiographic by apologetic authors, is that, since a distant past, the Indians did not know the difference between hagiography and biography. That these texts deal with accounts of the lives of gods, heroes, kings and dynasties is a fact, but from a hagiographic, not a biographical, perspective, in the sense in which we understand this last literary genre today. These texts were composed within the religious environment, by confessional authors, many of them taken with veneration, hence the hagiographic impetus (appreciative account). We often find the word Charita (or Charitra) translated as “biography”, however, when we consult these texts, without the dazzled predisposition of admirers, we realize that they are not biographies properly, but hagiographies with the inclusion of short tales. For example, the Buddhacharita, authored by Ashwaghosha (a Buddhist), can be found translated as “Buddha Biography”, strictly speaking, it is not a biography properly, although it retains some episodes, which may be historical, the text is, in general lines, a hagiography of the Buddha, due to the exaltations and the added tales. In addition, Avadāna is not a collection of biographies, nor a collection of stories; it is a collection of short tales (Jātakas).

3) Another claim by defenders of the historical character of Hindu literature is that the Itihasas (Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana) and the Purānas are records of real individuals and events, hence historical records, as they are coincident with each other and consistent with the geography, as to the mentions of places that can still be identified today (cities, rivers, mountains, etc.), in what they narrate, so the contradictions are minimal, so they are not written about fictional characters.

Comment: Quite the contrary, this is not what we find when the comparison is made, especially the differences between the critical editions and the vulgate¹⁹ editions. It has already been shown that accounts in the different Purānas are not coincidental, contradictions in general and in detail are frequent. The mention of places that still exist

¹⁹ Vulgate is the name of the Latin translation of the Bible by Jerome (347-420 c.e.), known by this name as it was translated from Greek into a combination of Literary Latin and Vulgar Latin, from a single Greek manuscript, therefore without the collation of several Greek manuscripts. At the beginning of the Modern Age, the interest in researching biblical manuscripts in Greek began, which aroused the interest in the comparison of different Greek manuscripts, starting the work of preparing critical editions, based on the comparison of different manuscripts, work of revisions and editions that continues to the present day, hence the large number of versions of the Bible. Since then, all editions, whatever the old text, that do not cross this comparison that precedes the critical edition, came to be called Vulgate editions, in order to differentiate them from critical editions.

today is not a rule for us to accept that the characters and events are also real, even if they are; it does not attest that everything reported happened strictly according to the narrative. As noted earlier, what is most proven today is the fact that most myths and tales are combinations of fiction and history. In other words, the period, the environment, geography and even the real characters are the background against which the construction of fiction in myths and legends is added. For the more apparently real the scenario, the more persuasive the plot.

4) Also, the argument, based on references from foreigners who resided in India in the past, especially the Greek Megasthenes (350-290 b.c.e.), who was ambassador at the court of Emperor Chandragupta Maurya (4th and 3rd centuries b.c.e.), probably between the years 302-288 b.c.e., that because they are foreigners, they are impartial, so they issued reliable accounts, which attests to Krshna's historicity.

Comment: Megasthenes wrote a text about India called *Indika*, in which he called Krshna Hercules, and used a confusing transliteration for Indian names that today's translators need to decipher in order to find out which characters and places he referred to. As well as the Persian Al Biruni (973-1048 c.e.), who also resided in India and wrote a lot about it. However, these authors did not carry out an independent biographical research, through an unprecedented historiographical research method,

on the life of Krshna, what they simply did was reproduce, in their works, what they saw before their eyes and what heard or learned from Hindu believers. Therefore, as already pointed out, they, as well as other Hindu authors before them, wrote about what Hindus believed about Krshna, namely, the belief in his historicity. Finally, these reports by foreigners are not evidence of historicity either; strictly speaking, they are other examples of reproductions of collective beliefs.

5) The many inscriptions and so many artistic reproductions are also evidence of historicity pointed out by believers on the existence of Krshna. Comment: Now, these inscriptions and these sculptures were created at a time when the belief in his existence and his deification were already well established among the Hindus. For example, the well-known Aihole inscription at the Jain temple at Meguti in the state of Karnataka, southern India, mentions the date as 3102 b.c.e., despite controversies in interpreting the translation of the inscription, such as the date of the Mahābharata war. However, this is a very late inscription, as the construction of the temple is dated 634 c.e. Also, what is even more disheartening for believers is that the date 3.102 b.c.e., it is the same date believed by Hindu tradition, since many centuries before, mentioned in the Purānas, which leads to the conclusion that the inscription is only a reproduction of what the Hindu tradition believes to be the date of the war. A reliable inscription on historicity would be

one that is contemporary with Kṛṣṇa's life, written by an eyewitness, that is, before the creation of so many myths and so many tales added to accounts of his life and sayings. The inscription is a sure proof, as it remains unchanged for many centuries, thus not allowing for so many changes and so many additions, as happened with the literature on Kṛṣṇa, but there is no contemporary inscription. The reproduction of what people believe, years or centuries after the occurrence, even if it is in an inscription, is not proof that that belief is a reality.

6) Most scholars today have come to the conclusion that Kṛṣṇa was a historical figure.

Comment: Majority or consensus of opinion does not automatically mean certainty, only that the opinion of a majority is only more likely to be true than the opinion of a minority. In fact, today, there are more scholars who agree with Kṛṣṇa's historicity than there are who disagree, hence the greater number of apologetic publications than critical publications. However, what needs to be noted is that many of the scholars who agree with the existence do so, but with reservations. See Bimanbehari Majumdar's opinion: "Western scholars at first treated Kṛṣṇa as a myth. (...) But, many of the Orientalists in the present (20th century) have come to the conclusion that Kṛṣṇa was a Kṣatriya warrior, who fought in Kurukṣetra, but many of them still observe the events of his life in Vraja (that is, his childhood and youth) as a despicable myth" (Majumdar, 1969, 01). In addition,

more recently, Guy L. Beck stated, “most scholars of Hinduism and Indian history accept the historicity of Krshna, that he was a real person, whether human or divine, who lived on Indian soil around 1000 b.c.e., and interacted with many historical people...” (Beck, 2005: 04). However, later on, he noted that the historical Krshna “has escaped the eyes and ears of serious research to such an extent that its 'real life' has become virtually immersed in mystery. The Krshna of Indian devotion and imagination covered up the objective historical Krshna by leaps and bounds...” (Idem: 04-5). There is a big difference in considering that everything in someone's life is history from beginning to end and, on the other hand, considering that part of the stories are historical and other parts are myths. This last alternative seems to be the most likely with respect to Krshna's life, if it is possible to remove the huge amount of myth added to the narratives of his life.

7) The historicity of Krshna is a matter that is no longer under discussion, as it is now accepted by almost all scholars of Hinduism.

Comment: As already mentioned, these Hinduism scholars are Hinduism teachers, Hindu adherents and followers of New Religious Movements who worship Krshna, such as the Hare Krshna Movement and others, so they are confessional scholars with gullible predispositions, so they leave a lot suspicion of sectarianism in their conclusions. With prudence, it is also necessary to listen to

unreligious researchers and historians. An issue that began with the distrust of Western scholars, has now taken an opposite position, is the current Western scholars who contribute to the case for historicity. The historical versions, purged of myths, suggested by Bankimchandra Chatterjee (Majumdar 1969: 233-50) and A. D. Pusalker (1955: 67-74) are still very mythological, despite attempts of purification. Furthermore, they were published before the critical editing works of the Harivamsha, and the semi-critical publications of the Purānas.

Strictly speaking, it is too early to say that “the subject is no longer under discussion”, because, on the contrary, there is not even a well-established project of “In Search of Historical Kṛṣṇa”, let alone that the discussion is closed, such as the much more advanced Jesus project “In Search of the Historical Jesus”. Compared with the latter, the scientific search for the historical Kṛṣṇa has not even begun, as it lacks a lot of scientificity, as the research is limited to a bubble of religious researchers or Hinduism sympathizers, so the search resembles a game with marked cards, whose result is predictable before the conclusion, due to the credulous predisposition of the researchers.

Kṛṣṇa in Buddhism

The Buddhist text that most extensively relates the life and sayings of Kṛṣṇa is tale 454,

known as Ghata Jātaka, especially the episode of his birth, through the exchange of babies, and other episodes that are difficult to identify in the correspondence to Hindu tradition, such as the satirical tale of the donkey guardian of the city of Dwāravatī (Dwārakā). Krshna is known by the name of Kanha (Black, corresponding to Vedic Krshna) in this Buddhist tale. A summary of this Buddhist tale will be reproduced below, with the names of the corresponding characters in the Hindu tradition in parentheses, since there are few characters with the coincident names in the two traditions. Of the episodes narrated in this Buddhist tale (Cowell, 1901: vol. IV, 50-7), the one about the birth of Kanha (Krshna) is the most easily identifiable with those known in the Hindu tradition, so it will be reproduced here and analyzed.

It speaks of King Mahākamsa (Ugrasena in Hindu tradition, father of King Kamsa), who had two sons, Kamsa and Upakamsa (it is not possible to identify to whom this latter son corresponds in Hindu tradition, since, according to Harivamsha 27.28, CE, Ugrasena had nine sons), and only one daughter Devagabbhā (Devakī, Krshna's biological mother), but in the version of Harivamsha 27.29 (CE), Ugrasena had seven daughters. In the version of Harivamsha 27:28-30 (CE), Devakī is not the daughter of Ugrasena, but rather the eldest daughter of Devaka (brother of Ugrasena), with six other sisters. Therefore, in the Hindu version, Devakī (mother of Krshna) is cousin of the tyrant

king Kamsa, while in the Buddhist version, she (Devagabbhā, mother of Kanha – Kṛṣṇa) is sister of Kamsa.

The Buddhist Version of the Birth of Kanha (Kṛṣṇa)

In the Buddhist version, on the day of the birth of Devagabbhā (Devakī), the Brahmins inform King Mahākamsa (Ugrasena) that this girl will destroy the country and the lineage of Kamsa. In Harivamsha 46 (EC), it is the sage Nārada who informs king Kamsa, during a visit to his palace, of the prophecy that the eighth son of Devakī will kill him. In Bhāgavata Purāṇa X.01, it is a voice from heaven that informs King Kamsa, during Devakī's wedding ceremony, that her eighth son will kill him.

In Ghata Jātaka, with the death of King Mahākamsa, Kamsa became king and his brother Upakamsa became viceroy. In the Hindu version, Kamsa did not inherit the throne upon the death of his father Ugrasena, he dethroned him and proclaimed himself king. Later, when Kṛṣṇa slew the cruel Kamsa in fulfillment of prophecy, Ugrasena was re-established on the throne of Mathurā. As soon as he assumed the throne, in order to avoid the fulfillment of the prophecy, Kamsa decided that his sister Devagabbhā should remain a virgin, so he built a round tower and imprisoned her inside.

Devagabbhā (Devakī in the Hindu version) had a maidservant named Nandagopā (Yashodā in the Hindu version), and her husband, Andhakavenhu (Nanda in the Hindu version), was the servant who guarded the cell. In Hindu tradition, the couple were not servants; Nanda was a cowherd in Gokula and did not watch over Devakī (Devagabbhā).

One day, a foreigner named Upasāgara (Vasudeva in Hindu tradition, the future father of Kṛṣṇa) arrived in the city of Mathura. Upon learning of the story of Devagabbhā (Devakī), he fell in love with her. So then he asked Nandagopā (the maidservant of the prisoner Devagabbhā) to schedule a meeting with Devagabbhā. The meeting happened and from the relationships, Devagabbhā became pregnant. The news of the pregnancy reached the ears of the Kamsa brothers (Kamsa and Upakamsa), who decided not to execute their sister Devagabbhā, but to wait, if the child is a girl, it will be spared, but if it is a boy, it will be executed. Thereby they allowed Devagabbhā (Devakī) and Upasāgara (Vasudeva) to marry. When the day of delivery arrived, the child turned out to be a girl, so she was spared. The couple were given land ownership in a village called Govaddhamāna. Devagabbhā (Devakī) became pregnant again and on the same day Nandagopā also became pregnant. Both gave birth on the same day, Devagabbhā a son and Nandagopā a daughter. However, Devagabbhā (Devakī) in fear that his son

would be executed by Kamsa, sent him to Nandagopā (Yashodā) and received Nandagopā's daughter in return. When the Kamsa brothers learned of the new birth of a child of Devagabbhā, they rushed to find out whether it was a boy or a girl. By confirming that she was another girl (after the change), they saved her life once more.

Strangely, the Ghata Jātaka states that Devagabbhā had ten sons and Nandagopā had ten daughters, all were changed parents, the sons lived with Nandagopā and the daughters with Devagabbhā and no one knew the secret of the changes. The eldest brother was Vāsudeva (Kanha – Kṛṣṇa), the second eldest was Baladeva (Balarāma), the ten brothers were known as “the Ten Slave Brothers”, that is, the sons of the servant Andhakavenhu (Nanda). When grown up, the ten brothers began to loot the neighborhood, the local population then complained to the king. The latter summoned Andhakavenhu and warned him for allowing his sons to plunder. The complaints were repeated and Andhakavenhu, fearing for his life, decided to reveal to King Kamsa the truth that the ten sons were not his, but of Upasāgara and Devagabbhā, so one of them was destined to kill him, according to the prophecy. King Kamsa was frightened, when he learned that the ten brothers were fighters, he decided to hold a fight, a ring was prepared in front of the king's gate, but Kamsa's fighters were defeated.

In this episode of the birth of Vāsudeva (Kanha – Kṛṣṇa), all those divine and supernatural elements, narrated in the Hindu versions, are absent, such as the descent of the god Vishnu into the womb of Devakī, the interference of the Goddess of Sleep (Yoganidra) in helping the exchange of babies, the joy of divine beings in heaven at birth and other miracles. In the Buddhist version, Kanha is just a human being with virtues (exceptional strength) and defects (practicing looting). The derogatory pretense is notorious, rather than descending from a royal family, Kanha (Kṛṣṇa) was the son of a servant (Andhakavenhu). All those fabulous miracles in his childhood (the overturning of the cart as a baby, the murder of the demon Putanā, the raising of the Govardhana mountain, etc.) known in Hindu traditions are omitted, to be replaced by reprehensible acts such as the practice of withdrawals in the company of his nine brothers. Finally, all the divinity of Kṛṣṇa (Kanha) is withdrawn, leaving him only the human character of a man gifted with physical strength.

Then Kanha (Kṛṣṇa) and his nine brothers conquered many regions, until, through a comic episode, they failed to conquer the city of Dwāravatī (Dwārakā), whose protection was made by an ass who, when approaching an enemy, he brayed in such a way that the city rose into the air, thus protecting its citizens. Therefore, the ten brothers decided to look for Kanha Dīpāyana (Kṛṣṇa Dwaipāyana Vyāsa, the mythological author of the

Mahābhārata, the Harivamsha and the Purānas), who guided them on how to avoid the city's erection with the bray of the ass, so the city was conquered by the ten brothers. If not included in a religious text, this episode would suitably fit into a comedy play. But the debauchery does not stop there, in another episode later on, the sons of the ten brothers decide to test the clairvoyance of Kanha Dīpāyana (Kṛṣṇa Dwaipāyana Vyāsa) placing a pillow tied to the belly of a boy, dressed as a woman, who was, then led to the presence of the seer. Therefore, the young people ask the seer "when will this woman give birth?" The seer Kanha Dīpāyana, through a crazy reply, said that within seven days that boy would give birth to a knot of acacia wood. The boys replied that "a man would never give birth to a child", so with a rope they immediately killed the seer.

Other episodes from the life of Kanha (Kṛṣṇa), in a camouflaged and derogatory way, are narrated in this tale (Ghata-Jātaka), also with considerable differences from the Hindu accounts, however it would be too extensive to reproduce them all here. In short, excluding the extravagant exaltations of Kṛṣṇa and his companions, as well as his pyrotechnic exploits, as in the Hindu accounts, this tale narrates, through the changes of characters' names, episodes of Kṛṣṇa's life in a derogatory and satirical way (for the full story, see: Cowell, 1901: vol. IV, 50-7).

Jainism

This is a little-known religion outside of India, with around four million followers on the Indian mainland and some communities abroad. It is the “probably most peaceful and austere religion in the world” (Fohr, 2015: 01, see also Jain: 1979: 01s), the exaggeration of peace and austerity is even repugnant to the secular individual set in the progressive culture contemporary. Jains boast that their religion is the oldest of all, although historical evidence for this is lacking, since almost all of the ancient data are myths.²⁰ As for the rigor of austerity, see an example of Jain severity and justification in the words of Sherry Fohr: “Celibacy is so important in Jain renunciation that one of the only times when it is allowed for monks or nuns to commit suicide is if their celibacy is threatened. This is because sexual activity removes the fuel or power (shakti) needed to progress on the path to moksha (liberation), and even an instant of sexual activity can dissipate all the power that has been stored up by the bachelor up to that time. It is better to die with that store of spiritual power than to risk losing it” (Fohr, 2015: 70).

²⁰ P. S. Jaini suggested that, if the mythological material is removed, therefore based only on the historical material, the antiquity of Jainism, considering the Tirthankaras prior to Mahāvīra that may be historical, cannot precede the 9th century b.c.e. (Jaini, 1979: 01n2).

The term Jainism derives from the Sanskrit noun जैन - jaina, which means one who worships the जिन - Jina (victorious), the name given to the saints (तीर्थकराः - Tīrthakarāḥ, literally: ford builders)²¹ of the Jain tradition. There were 24 Tīrthankaras, the last one was महावीर - Mahāvīra (Great Hero – 599-527 b.c.e.),²² reformer of present-day Jainism. His baptismal name was वर्धमान - Vardhamāna (Prosperous). The most revered Tirthankaras are Neminātha (Arishtanemi), Pārshwa and obviously Mahāvīra, the 22nd, 23rd and 24th Tirthankaras respectively. Mahāvīra was an older contemporary of the Buddha as well, both of whom lived in approximately the same region, eastern India, and are heirs to the shramana (ascetic) tradition, a non-Vedic tradition. Therefore, there are curious doctrinal similarities between the Jain and Buddhist religions, so much so that some of the first European researchers who studied Jainism in the 19th century thought that both were a single religion

²¹ The term तीर्थकराः – Tīrthakarāḥ is also translated as “passage builders”, referring to those who facilitate and lead one from one shore to another, that is, from the prison of saṃsāra to liberation (moksha) from the cycle of birth and death. A compound word that reminds us of the Latin word pontifex (bridge builder), an attribute given to the pope.

²² These are the dates assigned by the Shwetāmbaras; the Digambaras assign the date of his death to 510 b.c.e. (Fohr, 2015: 35). Some authors correct the dates to 539-467 b.c.e.

or that Jainism was a sect of Buddhism. Some even thought that Mahāvīra and Buddha were the same person. However, with the subsequent deepening of knowledge of the lives of both, doctrines and practices, by foreign scholars, it was possible to notice the many peculiar differences.

As in the other two great Indian traditions, Hinduism and Buddhism, Jainism is also a message aimed at the suffering and unhappy individual, or perhaps even more pessimistic, although Jains defend themselves by claiming that their doctrine is not pessimistic, while a layman, after knowing the Jain doctrine, you will wonder what can be more pessimistic than the Jain culture. Therefore, it is rare to find someone with achievements in life who is willing to lead the severely austere life of Jain renouncers, so the vast majority of Jain followers today are laymen, whose practice of strict ascetic rules is not mandatory, and not of ascetics (Fohr, 2015: 01). Among the rules of non-violence is the practice of not mistreating creatures, including microscopic creatures, so Jain monks and nuns wear face masks in order not to accidentally absorb microscopic organisms. The rigor goes so far that ascetics and nuns do not take meals at night, in order not to run the risk of involuntarily ingesting invisible organisms during the meal, due to the darkness.²³ The strict austerities include the

²³ This idea was conceived in Antiquity, when microscopic biology was not yet known, that is, before the invention of the

practice of fasting, some very long, the longest lasting up to a month, also the practice of pulling your hair by the roots two to five times a year, walking barefoot most of the time during the year, and not wearing clothes, therefore living naked, among other ascetic practices.

Jainism has to be understood from the great division into two irreconcilably rival currents: the स्वेतांबर - Shwetāmbara (clothed in white) and the दिघंबर - Digambara (clothed as the sky, naked), the first, in theory, more liberal and the second, more radical. The question centers on the idea that whether the Jain ascetic should dress in white or live naked, then nudity is the reason for rivalry. Among the many other controversies between these two rival sects, the following stand out as the main ones:

1. The role of nudity in the life of holiness: The Digambaras emphasize that the practice of nudity as an absolute prerequisite for the path of the ascetic, the only mode of conduct through which one can become truly free from shame and sexuality, and with that attain Moksha (Liberation).

microscope and, consequently, the discovery of the existence of cells, bacteria, etc., because today we know that this Jain attempt to avoid the death of microscopic organisms is fruitless, since the human and animal organism is composed of more bacteria than cells, whose processes of emergence and death happen all the time in billions and at a rapid rate, both in organisms and in nature. Therefore, even with these strict precautions, the organism of a Jain monk or nun is absorbing or destroying bacteria all the time on a grand scale.

Since the Shwetāmbaras emphasize the optional nature of this practice, while they censure attachment to clothing, they do not admit that clothing itself is an obstacle to salvation. The Digambaras insist that keeping a single possession is functionally equivalent to keeping all possessions, so they deny that the Shwetāmbara monks are real monks.

2.The nature of the omniscience of the Jina (Jain saint): For the Digambaras, the Jina (Jain saint) does not engage in mundane activities and any bodily functions (such as eating meals), as these are considered contrary to omniscient cognition. Jina preaches its teachings through divine and magical sound. The Shwetāmbaras, on the other hand, perceive the Jina as one engaged in normal human activities and functions while simultaneously enjoying omniscient cognition.

3.The position of the woman: The Digambaras believe that a woman lacks the pure body necessary to attain Moksha (Liberation), so she must be reborn as a man in order for this goal to be reached. The Shwetāmbaras take the opposite position, claiming that women can attain Moksha (Liberation) in their present life, just like men. They claim that the nineteenth Tirthankara, Malli, was a woman (Jain, 1979: 39-40).

Although the relationship between Jains and Hindus today is friendly, it has not always been that way, in the past this relationship has interspersed moments of hostility and affability, and even the

threat of syncretism. The first Tirthankara, Rshabha, was even included as a minor incarnation of Vishnu (Dundas, 2004: 233). On the hostile side, the Jains attacked the Hindu Vedas condemning their cruel and violent rituals of human and animal sacrifice, even collectively calling them the *himsashastra* (doctrine of violence). “The conclusive proof for the Jains that the Veda was a false scripture, that it preached a bad doctrine, is in its association with animal sacrifice” (Dundas, 2004: 234). A Jain author mocked as follows: “if killing can provide the achievement of the religious goal, then one should prefer to assume the life of hunter and fisherman” (Idem, 234). The gods Vishnu and Shiva were harassed and mocked by Jain authors, so narrative versions were created in order to downplay and even mock the sayings and deeds of these gods. Here, there will be no space to deal with all these hostilities; specifically we will limit ourselves to those related to the Hindu god Krishna.

The Jain Canon

Because of this sectarian rivalry, the canons of these two sects are completely different; texts accepted by one sect are not accepted by the other and vice versa. While the Shwetāmbaras recognize 12 Agamas (Primordial Scriptures), the Digambaras recognize only two Agamas, which are different from those of the Shwetāmbaras (Jain, 1979: 51). The only text recognized by both sects is the

Tattwārthasūtra, although the Shwetāmbaras do not include it among the canonical texts. The Digambaras claim that the entire canon has been lost, except for a small part of the Drśhtivada, the twelfth Anga, which deals with the doctrines of Karma, and so they deny that the texts preserved by the Shwetāmbaras are the original texts with those names (Cort, 1993: 186). Even so, despite canonical divergences, many doctrinal and practical points are common between both sects. On the other hand, sometimes, controversies are problematic for the initial understanding of Jainism, since, when we read the introductory books, some authors do not mention the sectarian sources of Jain doctrines and practices, which leads the reader to think that the teachings are shared by both when they are not always common (for Jain literature see: Schubring 1978: 73-125; Jaini 1979: 47-88 and Winternitz 1993 vol. II 408-571). The Digambaras occupy predominantly western and central India, while the Shwetāmbaras, in northwestern India, both divide into sub-sects, which in turn also divide into more sub-sects (for details, see: Fohr, 2015: 20-1). Despite these statements, Jerome H. Bauer did not notice so many differences and made the following observation: “doctrinal differences are sometimes trivial. In addition, although the Digambaras reject the āgama, or complete canon, upon which the Shwetāmbara mythology is based, the Digambara mythology is actually very similar to that of the Shwetāmbara. Both Digambaras and

Shwetāmbaras accept the same Universal History, or Cosmohistory, with some differences in detail reflecting differences in doctrine. This basic scheme incorporates much of Hindu mythology, for example, tales from the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata, with changes tailored according to Jain doctrine and tradition. In most parts, the two sects tell the same tales” (Bauer, 2005: 152).

Strictly speaking, there is no authentic record of what Mahāvīra preached two thousand five hundred years ago. Jain literature was orally preserved in the Ardhamāgadhī language, a dialect of Sanskrit, then spoken in the Māgadha region of eastern India for many centuries, but it has undergone considerable changes since the time of Mahāvīra, and then gradually translated into Sanskrit. Therefore, as it was initially preserved in the form of oral transmission, it is difficult to verify what exactly was taught by Mahāvīra and what was later added or removed by the disciples, with the intention of explaining the original teachings. In order to recover the content of this literature, several councils were held at different times and places, and what the monks were able to remember from the tradition was noted, as for nearly ten centuries the teachings of Mahāvīra were transmitted orally from master to disciple, with this has not preserved the original text. In view of this, many traditions have fallen by the wayside and interpolations have been added. Hence the reason for the controversy over the canon as well as the biography, teachings and

practices of Mahāvāra and the first disciples between the two main Jain sects.

As for the divine and magical sound emanating from the aforementioned Jina, Jains maintain that Mahāvīra's sermons were given in the form known as दिव्यध्वनि - divyadhwani (divine sound), which had a meaning (artha) which was translated by the गणधराः - ganadharas (main disciples). However, there is controversy among sects as to the nature of this divine sound. The Digambaras imagine that the divine sound was a monosyllable, like the sound 'OM', which could only be understood by the ganadharas (principal disciples). Whereas the Shwetāmbaras suggest that the Jina (Mahāvīra) spoke in a human language, which was also divine, in the sense that men of all regions, the animals, could benefit from hearing it. In subsequent years, the role of the ganadharas (principal disciples) was no longer to translate, but to simply compile and organize Mahāvīra's words into a systematic and comprehensive body of teaching (Jain, 1979: 42-3).

One of the most curious tenets of the Jains about the doctrine of Karma, which differentiates it from others in Indian traditions, is the belief that Karma is matter (pudgala), rather than something metaphysical or psychological, so they speak of a “karmic matter”, which is absorbed by the impure soul. Then matter (pudgala) is able to transform into Karma. For them, karmic matter is found floating free in all parts of space, so the impure soul absorbs

this karmic matter, just as "dust particles cling to the oiled body." This karmic matter adheres to the soul due to false notions concerning its own nature, lack of self-control, carelessness, passions and other impure activities.

Finally, for a sceptic, the primitive ascetic rigorism of the Jain ascetics seems like a waste of life. When we know the hitherto uniqueness of man's intelligent life in the universe and the billions of years of evolution required for the emergence of humanity, as well as the millions of years later for the development of the brain, it is shocking to know ascetics who waste the millions of years of human evolution in a single lifetime, instead of taking advantage of the functions and abilities accumulated in this long evolutionary process. The millions of years necessary for the development of intelligence, creativity, planning, reasoning, language, judgment of values, artistic skills, etc., are wasted in a few years, it is something like understanding that evolution has failed. The claim of the religious is that the development of these functions and these skills is not the maximum; there are goals that are beyond, in short, it is necessary to surpass the human level and become divine.

However, for the knowledge of Krshna in Jainism, we are interested here in the life of the 22nd Tīrthankara, अरिष्टनेमि - Arishtanemi, also known as नेमिनाथ - Neminātha, who was Krshna's cousin, according to the Jain tradition (Uttarādhyayana Sūtra XXII and

Trishashtishalakapurushacharitra Book VIII – the episodes of this Book are known by Nemināthacharitra or by Jain Harivamsha).

The Jain Purānas and Charitras

Just as much of the life and sayings of Krshna can be found in the Hindu Purānas, the Jains also have an extensive puranic literature. The number of Jain Purānas amounts to a total of over a hundred compositions, in Mahārastri Prakrit, Apabhramsa, Sanskrit and Kannada languages, although a much smaller number are those who have achieved importance in the Jain tradition. Different from the Purānas of the Hindu tradition, whose authorships, dates of compositions and regions are unknown, composed of many hands and over many centuries, which present many differences when comparing the manuscripts of the same texts. The Jain Purānas, on the contrary, are well defined in their authors and their dates of composition. In content, this extensive Jain collection sometimes coincides and diverges from the Hindu versions in order to adapt the narratives to the Jain ideology. Jain ideas and practices are always overwhelming and Jain characters are the protagonists. Many kings, heroes and sages become ascetics (jinas) at some point in their lives, especially in maturity. Some episodes in the Hindu accounts are altered, in the Jain versions, with the intention of ridiculing the Hindu version. The division

between Purāṇa and Itihāsa in Hindu literature is not obeyed in the Jain canon, as it is in Hindu literature, so themes from both are included in the Jain Purāṇas.

John E. Cort divided the Jain Purāṇas into three great types (1993: 187-8):

1. The life of one of the Tirthankaras (Jinas) of the present age (Jinacharitra).
2. The Jain version of the story of Rāma (Jain Rāmāyana or Padmacharitra).
3. The Jain version of the story of Kṛṣṇa and the war of Bhārata (Jain Harivamsha).

This last type is what will interest us here. Covering all these topics are the Jain Mahāpurāṇas, who provide the hagiographies of all 63 heroes of the present era, known as Shakalapurushas (Distinguished Persons: 24 Tirthankaras, 12 Chakravartins and 9 hero trios: 9 Vāsudevas, 9 Baladevas and 9 Prativāsudevas). The Jain Mahāpurāṇas (Charitras)²⁴ are extensive hagiographic works that compile the lives of important preceding characters in the Jain tradition.

²⁴ चरित्र-charitra: Sanskrit neuter noun (Prakrit: charita or chariya), meaning “behavior”, “habit” or “conduct”, when referring to the literary genre, is sometimes translated as “acts”, “life” or “biography”. This last meaning is problematic, since these accounts of the lives of saints and heroes are much more to what we know as hagiography than what we understand by biography, as they are very flattering, for this reason, when referring to a literary genre, I preferred to translate the term charitra by hagiography.

In the canon of the Digambara sect, the Jain Purāṇas are in a category called Prathamānuyoga (Primary Exposition), made up of accounts of the lives of ascetics, kings, heroes, and illustrious characters. In chronological order of composition, the most important works are primarily the Pauma Charita or Padma Charita (Life of Padma), by the poet Vimalasūri, composed in the 3rd or 4th century b.c.e. Padma (or Pauma) is another name for the hero Rāma from the Hindu epic Rāmāyana by Valmiki, whom Vimalasūri decries as a liar (Winternitz, 1993, vol. II, 469). The work is an adaptation of the Hindu epic to the Jain tradition (for a summary, see Winternitz, 1993: vol. II, 469-75). In the year 678 c.e., the ascetic Ravisena wrote the Padma Purāṇa (Jain), which is merely a slightly extended recension of Vimalasūri's Pauma Charita, agreeing on almost all the essential points. Then Punnāta Jinasena's Harivamsha Purāṇa, a work completed in the year 783 c.e., whose legends of Kṛṣṇa and his brother Balarāma are narrated in a Jain context, Mahāvīra's disciple Gautama is the narrator of the tale, with the insertion of many Jain sermons in the text. In addition, the legend of Arishtanemi (Neminātha), Kṛṣṇa's cousin, is included. The legends of the Kauravas, the Pāṇdavas and the descendants of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are told. The Kauravas are converted to the Jain religion, and finally the Pāṇdavas become ascetics and, like Neminātha, attain Nirvāṇa. Next in chronological order is the Trishashtilakakshana

Mahāpurāṇa (the Mahāpurāṇa of the 63 Distinguished Persons), the first part known by the name of Ādi Purāṇa with 47 chapters, the first 42 composed by Jinasena and the last 5 by his disciple Gunabhadra. The second part, known as Uttara Purāṇa, composed by Gunabhadra. A work from the year 897 e.c.

The collection of narratives, which is known as Jaina Purāṇa in the Digambara tradition, corresponds to the collection known as Jaina Charitra in the Shwetāmbara tradition. Therefore, corresponding to the last text above, the Shwetāmbaras possess the Trishashtishalākāpurusha Charitra (The Life of the 63 Illustrious Persons), authored by Hemachandra, composed between the years 1160 and 1172 e.c.²⁵ These Distinguished Persons (Shalakapurushas) are the 24 Tīrthankaras (Jain Ascetics), the 12 Chakravartins (Rulers of the World) and the 27 heroes (9 Baladevas, 9 Vāsudevas and 9 Prativāsudevas).

²⁵ English translation by Helen M. Johnson in six volumes, 1931-62. Book VIII of this work, with 12 chapters, is known as the Jain Harivamsha or Neminātha Charitra (Life of Neminātha). In addition to the life of the latter, this Book VIII relates the lives of Vasudeva (Krshna's father), Rāma, Krshna, and Baladeva (Krshna's brother). Book VII deals with the life and exploits of the hero Rāma, hence known as the Jain Rāmāyana. The accounts sometimes coincide and sometimes diverge from the Hindu versions.

Around 1200 c.e., the Pāṇḍava Charita by Maladhārin Devaprabha Sūri was composed, just like the Hindu Mahābhārata was composed in 18 sargas, whose 18 sargas from the Hindu epic are summarized in a concise form. Sarga 16 relates the legend of Arishtanemi (Neminātha) in connection with the legend of the Pāṇḍavas, it also relates how Arishtanemi and the Pāṇḍavas attained Nirvāṇa. Later, in 1551 c.e., the Pāṇḍava Purāṇa, also known as the Jain Mahābhārata, by Shubhachandra was composed. Therefore, Jainism is rich in narrative traditions, in addition to the Purāṇas and the Charitras, the narrative literature known as Kathā (Story) is also abundant, “during the Middle Ages and until today, the Jains were the main storytellers from India” (Cort, 1993: 187). Of all this extensive literature, from now on we will be interested in only those works relating to the life and sayings of Kṛṣṇa.

The Jain Harivamsha

Jain versions of the tales of Kṛṣṇa are little known outside India, due to the paucity of translations into contemporary languages. These Jain versions are known as Harivamsha Purāṇas, in line with the oldest Hindu version of the legend of Kṛṣṇa. Ascetic Vimalasūri is mentioned as the first author of the Jain version of the legend of Kṛṣṇa in his Harivamsha Purāṇa. However, no manuscript of this text has been found, so it is possible that the

authors of the later Harivamsha Purānas ascribed an antiquity and pedigree to their legends, in order to equate antiquity with the legend of the Jain Rāma, and thus attribute the Harivamsha Purāna to Vimalasūri as the source for his works. Strictly speaking, the earliest Jain account of the legend of Krshna is the Sanskrit text Harivamsha Purāna by Jinasena (known as Punната Jinasena, according to his lineage, to distinguish him from the later Digambara author of the same name) completed in 783 c.e., in Gujarat region.

Generally speaking, the Jain accounts of the legend of Krshna are less violent and less bloodthirsty than those of the Hindu versions. The Jain versions also have different character genealogies. Kamsa's role is diminished, while Jarasandha's role is enhanced. As well, early Jain accounts almost totally ignore the Pāndavas, although a later tradition, the Pāndava Purāna, filled this gap (Cort, 1993: 191).

The Jain Mahāpurānas

While the Jain Purāna focuses on the account of the life of a single Jain hero (or a group of heroes, such as the Rāmāyanas or the Harivamshas), the Jain Mahāpurānas reveal the accounts of the lives of the complete cycle of 63 Shakalapurushas (Jain heroes). The first work to be called a Mahāpurāna was written in the Sanskrit Mahārastri Prakrit dialect, known as

Cauppannamahapurushachariya, by Silanka, composed in 868 c.e. The greatest of the Jain Mahāpurāṇas was composed by the āchāryas (masters) Digambaras, Jinasena²⁶ and Gunabhadra, at the end of the same century, a work also known by the name of Trishashtilakshana Mahāpurāṇa. Another important Mahāpurāṇa is the work of the Gujarati āchārya of the Shwetāmbara sect, Hemachandra, composed between 1160 and 1172 c.e., also known as Trishashtisakalapurushacharitra, which also deals with the lives of the 63 Jain heroes.

On the relationship between the Jain Purāṇas and the Hindu Purāṇas, Padmanabh Jaini made the following enlightening remarks: “Even a quick glance at the Jain Purāṇas makes it clear that the Jain authors who composed them knew very well the Purāṇas and the Hindu Epics, they studied them with the attention worthy of a team of censors examining the offending passages of a text, and finally decided to rewrite the script in accordance with their own doctrines and their own sensibilities. (...). For they claimed that certain narratives of these texts (the Hindu versions) had been deliberately falsified by their opponents, the Brahmins. (...). What made the Jain authors view these Hindu Purāṇas with hostility was the brahmanical attempt to appropriate such worldly heroes as Rāma and

²⁶ Not to be confused with the other Jain author Punnnāta Jinasena.

Krshna, sanctify their secular lives, and place them as divine incarnations of their god Vishnu (Jaini, 1993: 207 -8). And he continued, then that “the Jain masters seemed to be faced with a difficult choice: either to accept the brahmanical version of history and predate their own identity as supporter of a different faith or create a new version of these tales in which these two heroes would be integrated in the Jain tradition and their magnificent lives would become submissive to the holy careers of the Tirthankaras...” (Idem: 208). This process of assimilating Hindu epic heroes into Jainism must have started only after Krshna's elevation to Vishnu's avatara status in Hindu epics and Purānas, as a Jain reaction to the appropriation of these two secular, hitherto pan-Indian heroes, by Hindus, transforming them into divine incarnations of a deity (Vishnu) of their own tradition. Therefore, by accepting the Hindu myths associated with these two heroes, though modified to fit Jain doctrines, and making them submissive to the Tirthankaras, the Jains were able to proclaim that these two folk heroes had indeed been members of the Jain community and had, in later degenerate times, been falsely proclaimed by Hindus as incarnations of their god Vishnu. Several old images reproducing the Tirthankara Nemi on a high pedestal flanked by the figures of Balarāma and Krshna, now preserved in the Mathura Museum, prove the belief of this hypothesis (Jaini, 1993: 211).

The Jain Krshna

The author Jerome H. Bauer thus broadly summarized the Jain depreciation. “Krshna, in the Jain tradition, is nothing more than a god than any other human being capable of achieving liberation from karma and rebirth, but he is not an ordinary human being either. Krshna Vāsudeva is, on the one hand, an archetypal Jain king and layman and, on the other hand, a Shakalāpurusha (an Illustrious Person) with an illustrious destiny. As such, he has the role of karmavīra or “hero of action” rather than dharmavīra (hero of religion), the role played by the Tirthankaras (Exemplary Saviors) and other ascetics. As karmavīra, he is also āshcaryavīra (wonder hero), an apparent miracle worker” (Bauer, 2005: 151). In other words, Krshna, the sublime incarnation (avatāra) of the god Vishnu in the Hindu tradition, is demoted, in the Jain tradition, to the mere status of Illustrious Person (one of the 63 Shakalāpurushas, more specifically, the ninth in the category of the Vāsudevas – worldly heroes).

On the next page, this same author further details Krshna's abasement: “A Tirthankara is an exalted master in his last birth before liberation. Krshna, on the other hand, is a mere Vāsudeva, a kind of Illustrious Person (Shakalāpurusha), standing below a Chakravartin (a Universal Emperor) and far below a Tirthankara. His role is to wield temporal power, to be a warrior in the literal sense, rather than to seek the higher calling of

renunciation and spiritual conquest. Kṛṣṇa, the Vāsudeva, is still active in the ordinary world of samsāra (transmigration), and he must eliminate his karma in the next lives, including time spent in the Jain hells” (Bauer, 2005: 153). This same author also points out that “the seemingly wonderful and miraculous events associated with his life (well known to Hindus and Jains) are performed by Jain gods, who are beings within samsāra, or by magicians of the “flying ascetics” type, who play the role of cheaters. (...). Kṛṣṇa, in turn, is subordinate to the Jain ascetics, especially those on the direct path to liberation, who are omniscient, in contrast to Kṛṣṇa, who has limited knowledge. Krishna is not, for the Jains, an incarnation of god, but an illustrious (though rarely exemplary) layman” (Bauer, 2005: 153-4).

In the Jain version, events relating to Kṛṣṇa's birth are similar to those reported by Hindu tradition, even miraculous events, thus attributing an exceptional character to his birth. However, his mischiefs in childhood and youth are not appreciated with approval by the Jain tradition, as in the Hindu version. “His mischief and his lack of control are not celebrated as in the Hindu tradition, and the affection, or Bhakti, for Kṛṣṇa, is not liberating, but the opposite: an obstacle to correct discipline, a tie to be broken before salvation is possible.” (Bauer, 2005: 155).

For Jains, many of the miracles performed by Kṛṣṇa, proclaimed by Hindu tradition, are the

result of misunderstandings among those who witnessed them. Jain author Hemachandra (12th century c.e.) related his version of tales of the well-known miracles attributed to young Kṛṣṇa. The Jain version of the harassment, in order to murder Kṛṣṇa, by the she-devils (khecharīs), Shakuni and Pūtānā, whose enmity with Vasudeva, Kṛṣṇa's father, from previous lives, is directed towards his son. Hemachandra's version is as follows: Shakuni stood on the chariot and then called for Kṛṣṇa, while Pūtānā pushed his poisoned breast towards Kṛṣṇa's mouth. For, in the Jain version, it was not the kick given by the child Kṛṣṇa that brought down the chariot, as in the Hindu version, but the interference of the guardian deities of Kṛṣṇa who brought down the chariot and killed both demons. Then Nanda, Kṛṣṇa's adoptive father, arrived at the scene and asked the cowboys, who witnessed the event, what had happened, and they claim that the child Kṛṣṇa killed the two demons without any help. For the Jains, this is how the legend of Kṛṣṇa's supernatural strength was born, from the misunderstanding of ignorant cowboys (Bauer, 2005: 155).

In addition, Hemachandra described Kṛṣṇa's youthful exploits with the gopīs: "Their love for him is like a disease, which leads them to distraction and neglect of their duties. They drop the milk buckets and let the milked milk fall onto the floor without knowing it. The gopīs pretend terror in order to be comforted by Kṛṣṇa, and they pretend not to

know the lyrics of the songs in order to be taught by Kṛṣṇa. They always touch him when they can, their passion is explicit" (Bauer, 2005: 155-6). In the Jain version, it is at this time that Kṛṣṇa's cousin, Neminātha, the 22nd Tirthankara, is born, who, from then on, will overshadow Kṛṣṇa's protagonism.

Despite so many Jain narratives drawn from the mythological accounts of the Hindus, including a summary of the history of the Hindu Mahābhārata, there is no such thing as a "Jain Bhagavad Gītā". Rather, Hemachandra reported a kind of "anti-Gītā". Tirthankara Neminātha, fighting on the side of his cousin Kṛṣṇa, initially takes a defensive role in the battle, but as the conflict escalates, she takes a more offensive role, including killing thousands of enemies. On one occasion, he has a chance to kill Jarāsandha, the head of the enemy army, but he lets Kṛṣṇa do it. In the Jain version of the Mahābhārata, Kṛṣṇa does not participate in the battle as Arjuna's charioteer, but encourages other combatants with words of bravery. Anyway, that long and untimely speech of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna, in the moment before the battle, when the armies were impatient and eager to fight, the well-known Bhagavad Gītā, does not take place.

The Jain Version of Kṛṣṇa's Past Lives

Some Jain narratives about Kṛṣṇa do not start with your current life, but predate your previous incarnations until his last incarnation as a Vāsudeva

(Mundane Hero). It is customary among Jain authors to begin the narratives of the life of a great character with an important event in one of his past lives, which can bear fruit in the events of that person's current life. Krshna's tale then begins in the seventh life prior to his current incarnation. At that time, the individual now known as Krshna was employed as a cook in a king's residence and achieved a great reputation for preparing the most delicious meat dishes. He obtained the title of *amṛta-rasayana*, as well as possession of ten villages. When the king died and his son succeeded him to the throne, the new king was influenced by a Jain monk and then banned meat consumption altogether. The cook (Krshna in a previous incarnation) had to quit his job and lost the income of nine of his ten villages. Realizing that the Jain monk, the instructor of the new king, was the cause of his loss, he fed the monk a bitter poisoned pumpkin, as a result, the monk passed away. Because of this cruelty, the cook (previous Krshna) was reborn in hell, eventually he emerged from that place and after several sufferings in subsequent births as a human and once a celestial being, he was born as Krshna, the ninth Vāsudeva (Jaini, 1993: 225). The Jain authors were content not only to belittle Krshna in his current life, but also in his previous lives, portraying him as a meat cook, which is repugnant to the Jains' vegetarian rigor, and as a murderer who was sent to hell, to finally be reborn as a supporting worldly hero (Vāsudeva). All of this

to justify and, at the same time, attribute the immoralities committed by Krshna, in his current life, to his bad karma in previous lives, and thus substantiate his deceitful and violent character.

The Combat between Krshna and Neminātha

On one occasion Neminātha (Arishtanemi) was offended by one of his cousin Krshna's companions, so, with wounded pride, he decided to wear Krshna's armor, which, together with the Panchajanya shell, was under strict guard. At the time, it was believed that no one except Krshna was able to lift the shell, much less blow it. Neminātha entered the precinct, impressed the guards guarding the shell by lifting it and blowing it, the resonance of the sound of the shell reached all over the city, which made the elephants break the chains due to the agitation.

When Krshna discovered that Neminātha had ventured to blow the Panchajanya, he realized that his younger cousin was a serious potential rival for his wives' affection as well as for his kingdom, so he decided to test Neminātha's strength. Then, in a friendly way, he invited Neminātha for a wrestling match. Neminātha simply extended his arm towards Krshna and immediately immobilized him with such force that Krshna was not able to move, and he was defeated (Jaini, 1993: 226). Not so much as to force, but other passages from the Jain texts try to demonstrate the superiority of Neminātha over

Krshna and, in this episode reproduced above, in no way is this demonstration more timely and, at the same time consolidated, than in the creation of a tale where both face each other directly in combat.

The Abduction of Draupadī

This tale is known to Hindus from a passage in the Mahābhārata (Vana Parvan, III.248-56 – Critical Edition – Van Buitenen, 1975: 705-23), whose lecherous king of the Sindhus, Jayadratha Vārddhakshatri falls in love with the beautiful Draupadī (Pāñchālī) since when he attended her marriage with the five Pandavas (Yudhishtira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva). When she resided in the forest with her five husbands, Jayadratha took advantage of the fact that the five brothers had gone hunting, so he sent his companion, King Kotikāśya, to mediate his approach with the beautiful Draupadī, who remained in the hut accompanied only by Dhaumya priest. The first attempt to entice her was unsuccessful, so King Jayadratha decided to approach her personally to seduce her. Failing by seductive means, he used force and pushed her, along with the Dhaumya priest, into his chariot and fled. Upon returning from hunting, the Pāndavas brothers were informed by a neighbor that Draupadī had been taken. Immediately, they ran after Jayadratha's carriage and caught up with her. The latter was defeated, then whipped, had his hair

shaved and threatened with execution, but in the end the five brothers decided to spare his life and was then taken prisoner.

The Jain version of the abduction of Draupadī (also called Krshnā), appears, among other texts, in *Trisastishalākāpurushacharitra* (the Acts of the 63 Distinguished Persons), Book VIII, Chapter 10, part 01, a text by the Jain sect Shwetāmbara, authored by Hemachandra (12th century c.e.), the Book VIII of this text is known as the *Neminātha Charitra* (the Acts of Neminātha) or the Jain *Harivamsha*. Unlike the Mahābhārata version, in the Jain version, the episode takes place in the celestial worlds of Jain cosmology. The lustful king is now Padmanātha, the sovereign on the continent Dhātakikhandadwīpa, who carries out the abduction of Draupadī, not through force, after the failure of seduction, but through the help of a god from the region of Pātāla while Draupadī slept. She is then taken to the mainland of Dhātakikhandadwīpa. Assured that no one from the continent of Jambūdwīpa (the continent of men) could reach Dhātakikhandadwīpa, since he would have to cross the violent and impassable Lavanāsamudra (Sea of Salt), King Padmanātha was reassured. According to Jerome H. Bauer, Draupadī's tale is omitted, without justification, in the texts of the Digambara sect (Bauer, 2005: 152).

Unlike the Hindu version, where Krshna is absent in the episode, he, in this version, is not only present, but also the hero who stars in Draupadī's

rescue mission, invoking the help of the Salt Sea god (Lavanasamudra), Susthita, who facilitates the passage of Kṛṣṇa and the Pāṇḍavas through this fearful sea. Arriving in the capital of the kingdom, the Pāṇḍavas faced King Padmanātha's army, but were defeated, so they requested Kṛṣṇa's help, claiming that the king and his army were too strong, so only Kṛṣṇa could defeat them. Kṛṣṇa turned into a lion-man, defeated the king's army, and rescued Draupadī, returning her to the Pāṇḍava brothers.

The curious thing about the differences between these two versions of the abduction of Draupadī, which deserves to be noted here, is that, while in the Jain versions, Kṛṣṇa is commonly placed as a supporting or even disparaged, in relation to the same tales in the Hindu versions, in this Jain version it happens the opposite. That is, Kṛṣṇa is omitted in the Mahābhārata version, whereas in the Jain version he not only figures in the tale, but, in addition, is exalted as the plot hero.

Relation of Some Little Data on Kṛṣṇa Sometimes Convergent and Sometimes Divergent in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Accounts

1) Kṛṣṇa was a descendant of a royal family of Mathurā, according to Hindu sources, but the Jain Uttarādhyayana Sūtra (XXII.01) mentions that his father Vasudeva was king in Sauryapura. Already in

Ghata Jātaka (IV.454.81),²⁷ disparagingly, he was the biological son of Upasāgara and the adopted son of a servant; he and his nine brothers were known as “the Ten Slave Brothers”, who practiced plunder.

2) His father's name was Vasudeva, hence he is called Vāsudeva (son of Vasudeva), according to the Mahābhārata, the Uttarādhyayana Sūtra (XXII.01 and 2), the Agni Purāna XII.03-7, and Vasudeva Ānakadundudhi according to Matsya Purāna 46.02 and Vāyu Purāna II.34.144-5, 159-63 and 172-3. In the Ghata Jātaka (454: 81), his father's name was Andhakavenhu, the servant.

3) His mother was Devakī, as per the Chandogya Upanishad III.17.06 (if we believe it to be the Krshna of the Mahābhārata), the Harivamsha, the Purānas and the Uttarādhyayana Sūtra (XXII.02). In the Ghata Jātaka (454: 81), his mother's name was Devagabbhā.

²⁷ Krishna is mentioned in this tale (Jātaka) by the names of Kanha (black in Pali) and Vāsudeva (with the long vowel “ā” in the first syllable, hence the patronymic name of Vasudeva, i.e., son of Vasudeva). In the colophon of this tale, Buddha reveals that his disciple Āmanda was Rohineyya (a court minister of King Vasudeva, father of Krishna) therefore a contemporary of Vāsudeva (Krishna), that his other disciple Sāriputta was Vāsudeva (Krishna) and that he (Buddha) was Ghatapandita, one of the brothers of Vāsudeva (Krishna), according to the version of this Buddhist tale, which differs from the Hindu version, in the latter, Krishna had only one brother (Balarama) and two sisters (Subhadra and Yashodā).

4) He had a half-brother by the name of Balarāma (Baladeva) or Sankarshana, as per all Hindu sources and in the Ghata Jātaka (454.81). In the Uttarādhyayana Sūtra XXII.02, his brother's name is mentioned as Rāma, son of Rohini, the other wife of his father Vasudeva, so it must refer to Balarāma.

5) Kṛṣṇa is mentioned by the epithet Keshava (one who killed the demon Keshin, also means “hairy”), and as the son of Devakī, which coincides with Hindu and Buddhist accounts.

6) He participated in a war as a charioteer, as narrated in the Hindu Mahābhārata, despite the differences in the details of both narratives. The Jain Mahābhārata does not include the Bhagavad Gītā; rather Kṛṣṇa is portrayed as an instigator and an advocate of bravery in war by the Jain tradition (Jaini, 1993: 221).

7) In Harivamsha 46.01-19 (Critical Edition), the warning that the eighth son of Devakī would kill King Kamsa (46:16) was announced by sage Nārada during a visit to the king's palace. Whereas, in Bhāgavata Purāna X.01.34 and Vishnu Purāna V.01.04, it is a voice from heaven, during the marriage of Devakī and Vasudeva (Kṛṣṇa's parents), who announces to King Kamsa the prophecy of his death.

8) In the genealogy of some Purānas, Kṛṣṇa belonged to the Lunar Dynasty and was the 94th descendant since Manu, while other Purānas mention that he belonged to the Solar Dynasty, that

is, both dynasties claim his descent (Pusalker, 1955: 50).

9) While in almost all texts his name is Krshna, he is known by the term Pali, which also means black, Kanha, in the Buddhist Ghata Jātaka.

10) While Hindu masters and devotees argue over the question of whether Krshna, as an avatāra of Vishnu, is subject to the law of karma or not, the Jain masters have no doubt that Krshna must go to hell for his acts of violence, committed to maintain the order of society and divine custom, and for their well-known sexual misconduct (Bauer, 2005: 151-2).

11) In the Purānas and Hindu epics, Krshna is always the protagonist, the divine incarnation of the god Vishnu, he is a sage and a hero, but in the Jain tradition, his protagonism is obscured by his contemporary cousin Neminātha (Arishtanemi), who defeated Krshna in a wrestling match (Jaini, 1993: 226).

Conclusion

After reading the above study, the reader may be asking which version to believe, the Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain version. Unlike the premature conviction of some authors and some adherents that doubt about the historicity of Krshna is an overcome issue, a broader perception reveals that it is still too early to reach such a conclusion, so the certainty of historicity still remains an open question.

As mentioned above, it is necessary to introduce unreligious researchers and historians into research and debates, rather than limiting themselves to the work of religion teachers and religious adherents. Again, I reinforce that simply “believing in historicity” does not mean that historicity exists, it is necessary to objectively prove and demonstrate it. In addition, unanimity of opinion is not certainty; it just means that a majority believes an opinion is more likely. Anyway, “historicity” is not the same as “belief in historicity”, historicity is a fact, belief in historicity is just an opinion, which may differ from others, the former is in reality, the latter only in the believer's mind.

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